

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY



111 081

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY

-

**TWENTY SHORT PLAYS
ON A
ROYALTY HOLIDAY**

-

TWENTY SHORT PLAYS
ON A
ROYALTY HOLIDAY

VOLUME II
(1940 to 1943)

*These plays, never before published, are offered
royalty-free to amateurs until July, 1943*

EDITED BY
MARGARET MAYORGA



SAMUEL FRENCH

New York

Toronto

Los Angeles

1940

Copyright, 1940, by Samuel French

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

All the plays in this volume are fully protected under the copyright laws of the United States of America, The British Empire, including the Dominion of Canada, and all other countries of the Copyright Union. All rights, including professional, amateur, motion picture, recitation, public reading, radio broadcasting, and the rights of translation into foreign languages are strictly reserved.

Amateurs may produce these plays free of royalty for the period beginning January 1st, 1940 and ending July 1, 1943, provided that one copy of the play, in separate form, is purchased for each member of the cast. Each of the plays in this volume is published separately at 35 cents per copy.

Copying of either the separate parts or the whole or any portion of this book by any process whatsoever is forbidden and subject to the penalties provided by the Copyright Laws of the United States.

WEST BRANCH

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
BY THE VAIL-BALLOU PRESS, INC., BINGHAMTON, N. Y.

PREFACE

Young people who are interested in becoming playwrights for amateur groups often ask me for information that will enable them to write "sure fire" one-act plays. If I were ten or twelve years old I would know exactly what to tell them. In fact, at twelve I did write one which was called "The Little Green Frog." It was given production, too, on the lawn between our house and the next one; and neighbors who were unable or unwilling to pay the five cents demanded for admission learned that white sheets hung on clothes lines provided a tent-like barrier to their inquisitiveness. I still treasure a picture of the cast. But now that I am no longer twelve, I feel much more certain about how a play should not be written than about how it *should* be written. Perhaps a few hints along these lines may, by inversion, prove helpful.

The first thing which should concern a beginning playwright is the subject matter, for there are some subjects which are not suited to stage production no matter how aged or wise the authors may be. I refer to practicability, not to ethics or morals. I remember a play that was suggested to its writer by a newspaper story; it was an absorbing item about the St. Bernard dogs of Switzerland and their services to humanity. The author understood that the newspapers contain innumerable tales which may be dramatized, but she overlooked stage requirements. In a play intended for amateurs, the cast included a pack of six trained St. Bernard dogs; and I understand from the owner of the one which roams the town I live in that St. Bernards are very difficult dogs to train. The play stated that one of these dogs must whine at certain speeches, frisk at others, lick his master's hand on occasions, growl, thump his tail furiously when delighted, and act generally in a

PREFACE

manner intended to bring down the house but much more likely to result in complete nervous breakdowns for the members of the cast. This was one play which should never have been written, because its subject matter was not suited to the stage.

I remember a circus drama also intended for the amateur stage, a drama of love between a man and his wife and another man — acted out on the flying trapeze while the acrobats performed in full sight of the audience. Obviously such a play would keep spectators on the edge of their seats, but even good acrobats would find it hazardous to try to catch both cues and equilibrium at the same time. It was another play which a writer should not have attempted.

Probably most readers will understand why such plots as these were unmarketable but will fail to see why they themselves should not write about kidnappers, and female vampires. The motivation is somewhat the same: the desire to be "different" that is a handicap to all young writers and artists.

Unless writers can find something significant to say about the people they know, there is nothing they can contribute to the drama of characters they have never met. If it is necessary to go outside of personal experience for a plot, then the would-be authors had better find other occupations for leisure hours. Honesty is good policy, in play-writing as elsewhere — simple honesty, not the kind that enjoys details which are painfully true. The following scene, for instance, is questionable drama in spite of its realistic details.

"The scene dims. — is revealed in the electric chair. He is hooded and the copper electrodes are around his head. His hands are held to the arms of the chair by other electrodes, as likewise one is around his leg. A generator has started off-stage. There is no other sound for a moment, then there is a lowering pitch of the generator as a powerful current is drawn off. The body of — writhes

PREFACE

and struggles for several seconds. The stench of cooked flesh permeates the air and wafts slowly down on the audience."

There is no doubt about the fact that the author of the above morsel was an objective writer, not one whose characterizations were simply different sides of his own personality. It is essential to objectify, to visualize plots, even though it is necessary to build miniature stages and move paper dolls about them in order to do so.

While visualizing a play, it is necessary to remember also that stage-time is limited, that in one-act plays especially action and interest may not be scattered over a variety of topics but must relate to one theme only. The action of a one-act play is generally episodic, something that happens in the lives of the characters without affecting their personalities deeply, something that leaves them essentially the same persons at the end of the play as they were at the beginning. Usually only longer dramas present adequate opportunity for development or degeneration of character.

If a writer would know what subjects to write about, as well as what to avoid, a good plan is to consider the plays that have proved popular in the recent past, for their popularity is related both to subject-matter and to the psychology of the times. In Volume I of this series, Sada Cowan's *Auf Wiedersehen* has proved to be the most popular drama in the book because, in addition to being well written, its anti-Nazi plot has satisfied the American temper of the day. Other very popular dramas in that same volume have been: Don C. Jones' mystery thriller, *The Inn of Return* (a sequel is included in this volume), Elise West Quaife's *Everybody's Doing It*, a cosmetic play, Jack W. Lewis' *Shooting Star*, a gold-mining drama, and William G. B. Carson's *Sweet "16,"* a school play. Both *Auf Wiedersehen* and Ann Seymour's *Lawd, Does You Undahstan'?*, an anti-lynching play, won important places for themselves in high school and Little Theatre tournaments.

PREFACE

And so, with these few words about some plots which did not prove marketable with amateurs and other plots which did, I hope ambitious playwrights may be able to draw their own conclusions.

MARGARET MAYORGA

Long Island, 1940

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
PREFACE	v
FLAG STOP <i>Marcus Bach</i> . . .	3
RENDEZVOUS — AMERICAN STYLE <i>Delia Van Deusen</i> .	25
SATURDAY NIGHT AT THE HALF- WAY HOUSE. <i>W. Branch Johnson</i> .	41
DON'T FEED THE ANIMALS . . <i>Bob Wellington</i> . .	68
MAL TRELOARE <i>Jane Dransfield</i> . .	81
LITTLE DARLING. <i>Peggy Oliver</i> . .	105
A KING SHALL REIGN! . . . <i>Marion Wefer</i> . .	127
"UTTER RELAXATION" . . . <i>Bert Griscom</i> . .	149
THE MIRACLE OF TONY ASSISI <i>Weldon Stone</i> . .	175
WHERE THE BUFFALO ROAM . <i>Dora M. Hooper</i> . .	209
BAYOU HARLEQUINADE . . . <i>Betty Smith and</i> <i>Clemon White</i>	287
THE CLOAK OF EVIL. <i>Don C. Jones</i> . .	257
FREDERICK <i>Marion L. Tallman</i> .	288
THE RING. <i>Virgil L. Baker</i> . .	321
MARY FINDS A MOTHER. . . <i>Phoebe Hoffman</i> . .	348
LACQUER AND JADE <i>Frances Fox</i> . .	369
RIGHT ABOUT FACE <i>Delia Van Deusen</i> .	397
FUN AFTER SUPPER <i>Betty Smith</i> . .	428
PLAY BALL! <i>Spranger Barry</i> . .	445
CHICO <i>Harry C. Gibbs</i> . .	465
AMONG THE AUTHORS	485

TERMS OF PRODUCTION

Amateurs may produce the plays in this volume free of royalty for the period beginning January 1, 1940 and ending July 1, 1943, provided that one copy of the play, in separate form, is purchased for each member of the cast.

Each of the plays in this volume is published separately at 35 cents per copy. The Separate Editions contain complete stage plans, character descriptions, and in some cases, musical scores.

FLAG STOP

*A Play Inspired by the Passing of Another
of America's Frontiers: the Small Town Depot*

By

MARCUS BACH

CAST

DAVID GILBERT, *a depot agent.*

SPRAGUE HIGGINS, *his friend.*

BETTY, *Gilbert's daughter.*

HELENE SAUERLY, *a maiden lady.*

GAYLAND WILSON, *a young man.*

JOHN SNYDER, *a native of Stratford.*

PLACE. A depot in the little town of Stratford, Kansas.

FLAG STOP

A depot in the little town of Stratford, Kansas. The stage is separated in the center by a counter and ticket window which permit two scenes: the depot office, right, and the waiting room, left. There is a swinging door or gate in this counter permitting traffic between office and waiting room.

The depot office is equipped with a table near the right wall against a window looking out over the tracks. On the table are telegraph instruments, a telephone with earphone attachment, and papers. A few pieces of express are set about, among them a baby buggy. Near the ticket window is an old and dusty ticket case flanked by timetables obviously in disuse. A large clock, whose face is not visible to the audience, is ticking and in the silent moments of the play is plainly heard.

The waiting room boasts a few benches and a pot-bellied stove in which there is no fire, since it is early June. A door in the back wall, left, of the waiting room leads outside. A gum-vending machine near the door is rusty and neglected.

As the curtain rises, the sound of a fast passenger train is heard approaching. It is a streamliner. From its metallic drone, the rising crescendo of singing steel, and the sustained whistle together with the steady sound of the bell, we know immediately that the train has not the slightest intention of stopping at Stratford station. In a moment it has flashed past the window and decrescendos as it speeds on.

Depot agent, David Gilbert, a kind of lonely man when you get to know him, sits at his table and watches the streamliner go by. He has done this hundreds of times before. When the train is gone he automatically reaches for the telephone, puts on the earphones, cranks the phone on a little box under his table.

FLAG STOP

Sprague Higgins, David's age, but somewhat older in appearance, sits tilted back in his chair, his feet on a smaller table on which a checker-board is patiently waiting the completion of a game. Sprague fingers his pipe, eyes the board philosophically. David telephones.

DAVID. Dispatcher? Stratford Station speaking. Golden Gate Limited by at three-fifty-eight.

[He removes the earphones slowly.]

SPRAGUE. Let's see here, David, was it your move? Or was it mine?

DAVID (*quietly*). I don't think I'd ought to play any more, Sprague.

SPRAGUE (*unhearing*). I was just fixin' to sashay out of this corner when you said, "It's time for the three-fifty-eight."

DAVID. Makes me feel guilty when I ought to be working.

SPRAGUE (*leaning over the board*). At what?

DAVID. Well, at — just working.

SPRAGUE. I had it figured up that you couldn't keep me out of the king row with anything less than a shotgun. Now, doggone, how was that . . .

DAVID. There's always superintendents liable to drop in, too.

SPRAGUE. Surprise me if the superintendents even remembered they had a depot here at Stratford.

DAVID (*plainly hurt*). I guess that's right, Sprague.

SPRAGUE. Or were you just goin' to move? Who the devil was going to move!

[Helene Sauerly has entered in time to hear Sprague's "devil" line. She stands tall, lean, and rightsously, and taps an umbrella importantly in her hand. Helene is about fifty-three. She is an old maid, but there is a kind of charm and dignity about her. The men have not heard nor seen her enter.]

HELENE (*with rising inflection*). I beg your pardon!

[Sprague's feet fall off the table.]

FLAG STOP

DAVID (*coming to the counter dutifully*). How-do-you-do, Miss Sauerly. I didn't hear you come —

HELENE. So I noticed. It's no wonder they have taken off all our trains.

DAVID (*with sincerity*). Yes, I'm sorry.

SPRAGUE. They haven't taken them off — they just don't stop.

HELENE. They haven't stopped for five years, Mr. Higgins.

SPRAGUE. All right, so what's the argument?

[*He brings his feet back up on the table.*]

HELENE (*under her breath*). That man . . .

[*She fumbles in her purse.*]

DAVID. Never mind the express notice, Miss Sauerly, if that's what you're looking for. I've got your baby buggy right here.

HELENE (*raring*). Baby buggy! (*Simultaneously with her ejaculation, Sprague's feet fall off the counter. Helene continues with rising inflection.*) I beg your pardon!

DAVID. Maybe I should have said "perambulator," the way it says on the tag.

HELENE. *Perambulator?* I ordered a *percolator*!

[*Sprague snorts.*]

SPRAGUE. Excuse me, Helene, but I was just thinking how doggone funny it was.

HELENE. I see nothing funny about it!

SPRAGUE. Did you ever try making coffee in a baby buggy? Oh now, I know there's lots of things can happen in those contraptions, but making coffee ain't one of 'em.

[*David has wheeled the baby buggy through the swinging gate into the waiting room.*]

HELENE. Is this a joke, Mr. Gilbert?

DAVID. This is what it says on the way bill, one perambulator.

[*Helene pivots toward the door.*]

FLAG STOP

SPRAGUE. Well, now, Miss Sauerly, what are you planning to do with the shipment?

HELENE. That's entirely up to you!

DAVID. Oh, but I didn't order this . . .

[*Helene is out.*]

SPRAGUE (*chuckling*). I'll be saddled for a mule! If this don't get to be the talk of Stratford it won't be my fault! Helene Sauerly getting herself a perambulator!

DAVID. It must have been her handwriting.

SPRAGUE. You sure hit it there, David. That woman writes the consarndest hand of any in town.

[*He lifts his feet back to the table.*]

DAVID. It's a funny thing. She's an intelligent woman otherwise.

SPRAGUE (*visualizing*). Yes, sir. I've got notes of hers I ain't never been able to read — complete.

DAVID. Notes? Don't tell me *Helene's* had to borrow money!

SPRAGUE (*in quiet reminiscence*). Not them kind of notes. Heart-beats.

DAVID. Heart-beats?

SPRAGUE (*as before*). Leastens that's what we used to call 'em.

DAVID (*quietly and thoughtfully*). Hmm.

[*He brings the perambulator back into the office.*]

SPRAGUE. You came to Stratford too late to know about it, David, and to most folks it's ancient history. But to me it's memories . . . (*David is sympathetic.*) The two of us graduated from high school at Willow City, used to ride over together in her pa's surrey with the black team. Used to stuff our notes down in the whip-holder on the dashboard. Once I even hid one in the eavespout over at her place. That night it rained. I always said that note went way down to New Orleans.

DAVID. What's worrying me is what to do with this push-mobile. There hasn't been a baby in Stratford since Rose Duncan's.

FLAG STOP

SPRAGUE. Yeah, and she left town.

DAVID. All I can do is notify the shipper.

SPRAGUE. Before you send it back I'll bring some of the boys down here to look at this new-fangled percolator.

DAVID. Beats me how you can be that way with Helene when you used to love her so.

SPRAGUE. Lov — ! Now, don't start that kind of talk.

DAVID. I thought you said . . .

SPRAGUE (*uneasily*). Come on here and move. (*After a moment.*) What way do you mean?

DAVID. Wanting to show the boys the perambulator.

SPRAGUE. Guess I wouldn't really when it came right down to it. 'Cause sometimes it just seems I'm sort of waiting for the time when — ah — Providence will give us a chance to talk things over.

DAVID. Seems to me you could get that chance just about any time.

SPRAGUE. It's better to let Providence arrange them things. Move.

DAVID. You never married and neither did she.

SPRAGUE (*adjusting himself in his chair*). That's 'cause I went to Kansas City to make my fortune.

DAVID. And they tell me she had to take care of her mother after she had that stroke.

SPRAGUE (*quietly*). For seven years she did that. Well, move. All you got to worry about is keepin' me out of the king row.

DAVID. Just a minute. (*David looks at his watch. He seats himself at the table as at the opening of the play. Sprague stuffs his pipe thoughtfully. In the distance is heard the sound of another streamliner coming from the opposite direction. The business that opened the scene is repeated. The train speeds by. Sprague, as usual, pays no attention to it. David watches it with solemn eyes. He picks up the earphones.*) Dispatcher? Stratford Station speaking. Number seventeen by at four-nine.

FLAG STOP

[*David sits thoughtfully for a moment.*]

SPRAGUE. What's the matter?

DAVID. Nothing.

[*David comes to the table, takes his place, ponders a moment about moving, finally moves a checker.*]

SPRAGUE. Sorry if my talking about — about Helene that way set you thinkin' about your wife who's passed on.

DAVID. No, no, it's not that, Sprague.

SPRAGUE. You've got a fine daughter, a nice little house across the tracks, a nice job. Don't see where you've got any kick comin'. Less'n you're worried 'cause you don't feel good sometimes.

DAVID. You heard those trains go by just now.

SPRAGUE. Don't pay much notice to 'em any more since they never stop.

DAVID. That's right.

SPRAGUE. What's right?

DAVID. They don't stop.

SPRAGUE. Oh, a freighter stops every coupla days.

DAVID. But no passenger.

SPRAGUE. Wait a minute! I'll jump the whole caboodle if you do that!

DAVID. It means an awful lot to me, Sprague.

SPRAGUE. The game?

DAVID. Stratford Station. I've been a town depot agent for over thirty years. I'm ending up at a flag stop. Guess I wouldn't talk this way if you hadn't started in about you and Helene. There's probably more to your old friendship and *heartbeats* than you'll admit.

SPRAGUE. That's plumb silly talk.

DAVID. There's more to me and the road, too. I never talked to anybody about trains running through and never stopping nor about the mail being brought in by truck now so that not even mail trains stop any more. Yes, I did, too, talk about it once, to my daughter, Betty. Then like a dumb fool I got to crying.

FLAG STOP

SPRAGUE. Get to cryin' around me and I'll put you in the *percolator*.

DAVID. I thought by the time I was near sixty I'd be a big officer on the road. I'm at a flag stop. I've seen the new engines come in, air-conditioned coaches, the streamliners . . . though they never even stopped here on the trial run. They go to Omaha on the West and Kansas City on the East, and there hasn't been a flag stop out of Stratford since the streamliners came in. And, Sprague, there's just a chance they might close Stratford Station altogether one of these days.

SPRAGUE (*with concern*). Now, wait a minute!

DAVID. There'd be more to that than just losing out on a checker game. A pension would take care of Betty and me, but there's something it wouldn't do. You see, Sprague, I knew most of the men on these runs in the old days . . . it gives me sort of a sore spot . . .

[*He indicates his heart.*]

SPRAGUE (*uneasily*). Now, let's not get sentimental in the heat of the day. Stratford ain't the only town on the line that's been left high and dry. What's happened is plain as day. The trucks have taken over the hauling business in these small towns.

DAVID. It's a long story. First the traveling men stopped riding trains. That was because the roads were graveled and they could go with cars. So they took off passenger trains. Then local truckers began hauling cattle and they took off our cattle trains. Next came out line trucks and took the freight and express. Then the buses came and handled the mail and the few folks who maybe didn't have cars. I remember how I told the superintendent when they transferred me here, "I'll make Stratford a regular stop station again." But I didn't. I tried hard for a good many years. I worked, Sprague. Now you've got me won over to playing checkers to kind of forget things.

FLAG STOP

SPRAGUE. I don't know whether I'd call what you're doin' playin' or not.

DAVID. I'd like just once to have somebody be leaving Stratford so I could once in my life flag stop one of those fliers going either east or west.

SPRAGUE. You'd sure have the whole town down here if that ever happened. Oh, it'd be a thrill and no foolin' to just hold out a little flag and stop one of them stream-liners that go through here with their noses up.

DAVID (*moving a checker*). It's not only that; it's another kind of feeling.

SPRAGUE (*jumping three men*). By gad, you're sure playin' a devil of a game!

[*Helene has come in.*]

HELENE. Mr. Higgins!

[*Sprague's feet fall.*]

SPRAGUE (*to himself*). I'll be son-of-a-gunned.

DAVID (*getting up*). Well, Miss Sauerly.

HELENE. I have never been around Mr. Higgins but that he was swearing at the top of his voice.

SPRAGUE (*to himself*). I'll be doggoned if it don't beat all.

DAVID. Is there something I can do for you, Miss Sauerly?

HELENE. I've decided to keep the perambulator.

(*Sprague, who has just started to put his feet back up, lowers them.*) That is, not for myself! Dear me, what am I saying!

DAVID. Well, I'll wheel it back out to you.

SPRAGUE (*with sincerity*). Helene, you . . . that is . . .

I'll help you get it home.

HELENE (*testily*). I shall take care of that very well myself! (*Then.*) Dear me, how *shall* I manage it?

DAVID. You want old Jordan to bring it up for you? He hasn't used his livery-dray for quite a while, but . . .

HELENE. I said I would handle it.

DAVID. I'll look up the way bill.

[*David goes to his table.*]

FLAG STOP

SPRAGUE (*gently*). If you don't mind, Helene, what *are* you hankerin' to do with it?

HELENE (*shortly*). A wedding.

SPRAGUE. A wedding! (*A lump rises in his throat.*)

You mean you . . . ! I thought you'd been lookin' like a schoolgirl of late.

HELENE (*with offense*). Flatterer! (*Then, with a slight sigh.*) My schoolgirl days were over thirty years ago.

SPRAGUE (*with sincerity*). Maybe, in a way, Helene, but when your cheeks flush up like they do now . . .

HELENE (*annoyed, but pleased*). My cheeks do not flush!

DAVID (*coming with the papers*). Here you are, Miss Sauerly. If you'll sign right here.

SPRAGUE (*while Helene signs*). I only say it for your own good, Helene. It's goin' to look mighty funny for you to wheel the thing up the street at this hour of the day.

DAVID (*innocently*). Wouldn't it look funnier for the both of you to wheel it?

HELENE. Why didn't they send it dismantled?

SPRAGUE. Ain't it always the way with these companies?

Of course, Helene, you ordered a percolator.

HELENE. I know I did, but this must serve the purpose, since the shower is tonight.

SPRAGUE. Oh, the shower! The Phillips girl.

DAVID. I heard Betty talking about it this noon.

SPRAGUE (*relieved*). Oh, that's it.

HELENE (*confidentially to David*). You know about such things, Mr. Gilbert. Will it be too out of place to present her with this?

SPRAGUE (*answering emphatically for David*). I should say not! In this day and age . . .

HELENE. I know all about this day and age!

[*The telephone rings.*]

DAVID. Just a minute. I'll give you your receipt.

[*David goes to the telephone. During Sprague's and Helene's lines he puts the telephone report down on paper.*]

SPRAGUE. Helene . . . (*Helene fingers her purse nerv-*

FLAG STOP

ously.) I wasn't just talkin' when I said that about your lookin' young-like. You do. You remember how we used to dress up like we was older than we were? Now we don't want to act as young as we really feel about some things.

DAVID (*at the phone*). Just a minute and I'll look it up, Mr. Weaver.

[*David has business at his freight fle.*]

SPRAGUE. Helene, I've stood down at the postoffice often and watched you when you came in for your mail. I've been afraid to talk to you because of a funny feelin' I had that you didn't want anything to do with me. Oh, I know you'd pass the time of day with me kind of short-like. You know, I've even come to church just to be where I could see you.

HELENE. That's a very sacrilegious thing to do, Sprague Higgins.

SPRAGUE (*quietly*). Maybe it is, and then again, maybe there's some religion in it.

HELENE. You always talked strange. It's very disturbing.

SPRAGUE (*absently pushing the perambulator back and forth in his embarrassment*). Helene . . .

HELENE. Stop doing that.

DAVID (*at the phone*). Read your figures and I'll check them, Mr. Weaver.

SPRAGUE. Remember the time we fixed up that package for your Maw and then sent it to her special delivery through Postmaster Green . . .

HELENE (*aloof, but yielding*). I have always had a very good memory.

SPRAGUE. Guess the reason I never talk much to you is because you always seemed so much better and smarter than me, Helene . . . If I ever did talk the whole town would be buzzing like a nest of bees. But, I sure wanted to. And now that Providence has fixed up this chance . . .

FLAG STOP

HELENE (*turning to him, quietly disturbed*). Please, not so loud.

SPRAGUE. Don't mind David. He'd like to stop a train. I'd only like to stop you for a minute, Helene. Now, that's a dev — dickens — of a thing to say. Gosh, I didn't mean to compare you to a train, Helene!

[*They are interrupted by the entrance of Betty Gilbert and Gayland Wilson. They are young. Betty is perhaps twenty-two; Gayland about twenty-six. They are in happy spirits, talking as they come in.*]

BETTY (*at sight of the baby buggy*). Hello! What's this?

HELENE (*shortly*). A mistake.

SPRAGUE (*stooping down and beginning to dismantle it*). It's for the shower.

GAYLAND. If it's more than a sprinkle you'll get wet in that.

SPRAGUE. City feller.

GAYLAND. Sorry.

[*Sprague is down on the floor and begins to work on the perambulator much as a mechanic might work on a car. David has closed his telephone business when Betty rushes over to him.*]

BETTY. Dad!

DAVID. What are you doing here at this time of the day, Betty?

BETTY. Guess what's happened! Mr. Wilson's car broke down! Isn't it wonderful! He's got to take a train!

DAVID. You mean — this young man —

BETTY (*bringing David out*). You know Mr. Wilson, dad, he's often been in town —

DAVID. You mean — flag stop, Mr. Wilson?

GAYLAND. Any way to get me to Brenham, Mr. Gilbert.

DAVID (*crestfallen*). Brenham! I can't get you to Brenham!

BETTY. You can flag stop the four-thirty-four.

GAYLAND. Doesn't it stop at Brenham?

FLAG STOP

DAVID. It stops there all right, Mr. Wilson, but flag stop is only for Dodge City and beyond.

GAYLAND. Then I'll buy a ticket to Dodge City and get off at Brenham.

BETTY. Of course! I mean — that will be quite an expense, won't it?

[The perambulator falls over on Sprague.]

SPRAGUE. Damn!

HELENE *(to his rescue, kneeling beside him)*. Sprague! Are you hurt?

SPRAGUE *(sitting up)*. Glad it wasn't a surrey.

GAYLAND *(helping)*. Or a ton truck.

HELENE *(to Gayland)*. I'll hold it for him.

DAVID. You really think you might do that, Mr. Wilson?

GAYLAND. I'm afraid it's worth it. You see, I'm meeting my dad there tonight . . .

BETTY. He's driving from Wichita.

GAYLAND. Dad sent me here to negotiate with a bunch of farmers about a grain elevator and . . .

BETTY. And they might build one here in Stratford. In fact, it's very possible.

GAYLAND. Just when I'm ready to leave I burn out a bearing in the old jalopy . . .

BETTY. And nobody in town has a taxi permit and we without a car. Go on, Mr. Wilson.

GAYLAND. You see, Mr. Noble lives in Brenham and he's the . . .

[Sprague is pounding a wheel off the perambulator.]

DAVID. Sprague! You mean, Mr. Wilson, one of the big Wilson-Noble elevators might be built here in Stratford?

GAYLAND. I think the territory warrants one. And if I can meet Dad tonight as scheduled, I believe we can settle it.

DAVID. I'll make you out one for Dodge City and you can catch number nineteen at four-thirty-four.

FLAG STOP

[David pulls his watch from his pocket, consults it, and goes to the telegraph at the table.]

SPRAGUE. I don't know how Ford does it. This is the complicatedest piece of machinery I ever saw.

GAYLAND. Maybe it's out of your line, Mister.

SPRAGUE (*shortly*). Maybe it is and maybe it ain't.

HELENE. Sprague was always good at this sort of thing — I mean, around machinery.

BETTY. Are you really going to give this to Mary Phillips?

SPRAGUE. Do you think it could be for anybody else?

HELENE. Sprague!

[Helene tugs at her kerchief.]

GAYLAND. It might be very appropriate.

BETTY. Oh, it's not that kind of a wedding!

SPRAGUE. What kind of a wedding?

HELENE. Such talk!

[She goes out.]

SPRAGUE (*getting to his feet*). Oh, now, Helene! What did I do now?

[He gets to his feet and soon goes out, taking two of the wheels of the perambulator with him.]

BETTY. I only meant, it isn't your wedding, is it?

SPRAGUE. Maybe it ain't, but I don't want it to be my funeral either.

[He goes out.]

GAYLAND. Holler if you need some help. (*He turns to Betty.*) Or maybe I've got my own problems on hand.

BETTY. How do you usually meet your problems, Mr. Wilson?

GAYLAND. Usually with open arms, Miss Gilbert.

BETTY. Let's finish the job for them.

GAYLAND. That's what I was thinking of doing.

BETTY. I meant the perambulator.

GAYLAND. That's what I meant.

[He gets down to work.]

FLAG STOP

BETTY. Do you know anything about these things?

GAYLAND. I got my start working with farm machinery.

BETTY. I suppose you used these on the farm.

GAYLAND. No, but my mother did.

BETTY (*kneeling down, helping him*). You don't look like a farmer.

GAYLAND. You don't especially look like Stratford.

BETTY. You'll be coming back for your car, won't you?

GAYLAND. Why do you think I let it break down?

BETTY. I didn't know you had it trained that way.

GAYLAND. I haven't usually.

BETTY. Was this something special?

GAYLAND. Extra special.

[*David, having finished at the telegraph, comes from the office.*]

DAVID. Betty, kind of look after things a minute while I run up to the store.

BETTY. Can I get something for you, dad?

DAVID. I've got the message in, Mr. Wilson. Pretty soon we'll throw the flag for the four-thirty-four.

GAYLAND (*getting the buggy dismantled*). You wouldn't think the old girl would give anything like this, even for a shower.

DAVID. Neither did she.

[*David goes. Betty sits on a bench, Gayland on the floor.*]

GAYLAND. I don't suppose you knew that, did you?

BETTY. What?

GAYLAND. That you're extra special?

BETTY. No, it's news.

GAYLAND. There's news behind the news, too.

BETTY. What?

GAYLAND. What about that fellow at the store who asked you to go to the alumni banquet at Willow City tonight?

BETTY. I didn't say I'd go.

GAYLAND. No, and you didn't say you wouldn't either.

FLAG STOP

BETTY. Are you interested, Mr. Wilson?

GAYLAND. I am, Miss Gilbert. Is that where you went to High School?

BETTY. M-hm.

[Gayland gets another piece off the buggy.]

BETTY. Seems to me you're trying to get that into just as many pieces as you possibly can.

GAYLAND. You're observing.

BETTY. Do you know, you're making this an awfully big day for my dad?

GAYLAND. For your *dad*!

BETTY. I'll bet he's up buying himself a new coat for the big moment when he stops the four-thirty-four.

GAYLAND. It might be a big day for him, but it could be a bigger night for me.

BETTY. But you don't know what it means to him.

GAYLAND. Just think, there'd be Willow City and the little red school . . .

BETTY. Willow City?

GAYLAND. Would you go?

BETTY. Your car's broken.

GAYLAND. I think I could carry you twelve miles.

BETTY. Could you?

GAYLAND. Would you go if we could find a way?

BETTY. You've got to get to Brenham.

GAYLAND. There's another way to get to Brenham besides the four-thirty-four.

BETTY. You don't know Stratford, Mr. Wilson.

GAYLAND. I know I could order a plane out of Kansas City, be picked up at the Willow City airport and . . .

BETTY. Thrilling!

GAYLAND. And get to Brenham before number nineteen.

BETTY. I'd go down to the airport with you, right after the banquet! I've never seen anyone off on a plane before!

GAYLAND (*getting up*). Where's a phone?

FLAG STOP

BETTY. Right over . . . (*She starts to show him the phone; stops suddenly.*) Oh, no, no. You couldn't do that!

GAYLAND. Then we'll go up to the telephone office.

BETTY. I mean, you — you've got to take the train.

GAYLAND. For dad's sake?

BETTY. It is kind of foolish, isn't it?

GAYLAND. Seems that way when tonight could mean a lot to you and me. Or maybe it isn't foolish — I don't know.

BETTY. Sometimes I think it's maybe pretty natural — the way dad feels — working as he has with the same road all his life — going down instead of up as he'd planned, seeing the trains go through every day, with the men he used to know running them.

GAYLAND. Maybe I can get the Wilson-Noble Company to build an elevator right on the tracks, or maybe they'll get a good district manager here — a nice young man connected with the firm . . .

BETTY. And trains stopping at Stratford all the time — trains picking up grain.

GAYLAND. I think you've got trains on your mind. Betty, when I come back for the car, will you run over to Willow City or somewhere with me?

BETTY. M-hmm.

[*Sprague and Helene come in in happy spirits. Helene clears her throat at sight of Betty partly in Gayland's arms.*]

SPRAGUE (*chuckling*). Doggone, sure must be somethin' in the air.

GAYLAND. Have you noticed it?

SPRAGUE. By gum, I've felt it!

HELENE (*pleased at the dismantled perambulator*).

Thank you very much, Mr. Wilson.

GAYLAND. The way they had it put together they must have been thinking of twins.

HELENE. Sprague and I can carry it very nicely now.

FLAG STOP

BETTY. I'll help you, too, after the four-thirty-four.

SPRAGUE (*pleasantly to Gayland*). Too bad you're a stranger hereabouts, Mr. Wilson, or Helené and I'd take you all with us to Willow City tonight.

GAYLAND. What's taking *you* over there?

SPRAGUE (*sincerely*). Memories, mister. Memories and heartbeats.

HELENE (*in gentle warning*). Sprague . . .

BETTY. You're going to the banquet, Miss Sauerly?

HELENE. Sprague and I thought we might, out of our duty to the school.

SPRAGUE. My car is old, but it's a two-seater, and it'll run.

GAYLAND. Well, Betty?

BETTY. I'd like to say yes, but . . . (*David enters. He is wearing a brand new blue jacket and a new cap.*) Dad, you look marvelous!

SPRAGUE. What the dev — dickens!

HELENE (*pleased*). Mr. Gilbert!

DAVID (*going over to the old ticket case and opening it*). There's a big crowd of about *twenty* folks on their way down.

BETTY. You hear!

GAYLAND. Sure, but the four-thirty-four doesn't stop at *Willow City*.

BETTY. There'll always be Willow City.

DAVID. Here's your ticket, Mr. Wilson. I hate to charge you for it, too, especially since it's seven dollars and since you could go all the way to Dodge City instead of just to Brenham — and especially because of other reasons, too.

SPRAGUE. You just better keep the flag handy, David, 'cause someday maybe there'll be *two* folks goin' to Dodge City and *beyond*.

BETTY. Now, Sprague . . .

SPRAGUE. I don't mean you!

HELENE. Sprague . . .

FLAG STOP

GAYLAND (*business with money*). There you are.

DAVID. Thank you, Mr. Wilson. Thank you very much.

And I — I hope you won't mind some of the folks coming down. I just mentioned it to them sort of casually like up town, but, of course, they kind of got excited.

SPRAGUE. Look at you! You're so excited yourself you still got a tag on the sleeve of that coat.

BETTY. So you have.

[*Betty relieves him of the tag.*]

HELENE. It's a great day when something happens that you always looked forward to happening someday.

DAVID. Yes, isn't it?

SPRAGUE. It sure is.

GAYLAND (*putting the ticket in his billfold*). It sure must be . . .

BETTY. Listen!

[*The low rumble of the train is heard in the distance.*]

DAVID. She's early!

[*He goes back to the table and picks up a small green and white flag, shakes out the dust.*]

HELENE. Can you do it with that little flag?

JOHN SNYDER (*rushing in*). Hey, David, she's comin' down at the forks!

DAVID (*attending to duties excitedly while Betty straightens his cap*). I got her warned on the telegraph.

BETTY. Are you sure, dad?

DAVID. Sure as day. You hear that? Two short whistles? That means the engineer got the conductor's signal on the stop rope. That means he's watching for a flag stop at Stratford. Come on, Mr. Wilson!

JOHN (*who has gone to the window in the office*). Must be all of fifteen people out there!

DAVID. She's coming! But this time she's going to stop!

[*He has taken Gayland's suitcase and goes out.*]

SPRAGUE. It's so doggone excitin' I could cuss.

HELENE (*gently*). Sprague . . .

FLAG STOP

[She offers him her arm.]

SPRAGUE. Awh, gosh! Helene!

[He has a perambulator wheel in his hand and twists it in his embarrassment.]

HELENE. Look out!

SPRAGUE. I don't know my own strength!

[He takes her arm and they go out. The train is near.]

GAYLAND. Coming out, Betty? *(She shakes her head.)*

You've been swell to me.

BETTY. That was easy.

GAYLAND. So long.

BETTY. So long, Gayle.

[He takes her in his arms. John turns.]

JOHN. Hey, you'd better hurry, she's . . .

[He gulps as Gayland kisses Betty.]

GAYLAND. I'll be back.

BETTY. Good-by.

JOHN. She's here! *(Gayland goes. Betty remains near the counter. The train comes to a stop outside.)* Your Paw's right out there in front. He's holdin' that little flag right in the face of the streamliner. I'll be dog-goned! The feller's gettin' on. Your Paw's shakin' hands with him — now with the brakeman, and with the conductor. Doggone! Look at him! Wait — there's the signal. Never did see a streamliner stop before. She's takin' off. You ought to see your Paw, Betty. Looks to me like he's a-cryin'! Looks like Sprague Higgins is a-cryin', too! Helene's put her arm around him! Well, doggone! It's sure a good thing that trains don't stop here every day!

[The streamliner departs and fades out in the distance as the curtain falls.]

RENDEZVOUS — AMERICAN STYLE

By

DELIA VAN DEUSEN

Copyright, 1940, by Samuel French.

CAST

ARTHUR COOPER.

ZERELDA, *his wife, formerly Zerelda Stratton, of Super-Chassis Pictures, Inc.*

LEONARD SCOTT, *Arthur's business partner.*

PITTY-PAT.

TIME. The present.

RENDEZVOUS — AMERICAN STYLE

A sitting room in the Strattons' house in New York. It is a modern room done in a color scheme of white, silver and gold. Doors at far left and right are almost concealed by tall screens covered with silver wall-paper. There is a fireplace at center rear, flanked by two tall windows hung with sweeping draperies of silver and gold brocade. Set at an angle left from the hearth a couch with rolling arms faces a deep chair with a small low table between them. A few other chairs and occasional tables are grouped about the room. There are flowers in low bowls and these and a few pieces of modern bric-a-brac are exquisitely arranged. It is a charming room, obviously a background for its mistress, Zerelda Stratton-Cooper, who, dressed — not too extensively — in trailing chiffon, half reclines on the couch smoking a cigarette in a long jade holder.

Actually, Zerelda is not more than ordinarily good looking, but it is evident that her hair dresser is a genius, her dressmaker a jewel, and her maid — you somehow know she has one — an artist in the application of those aids to beauty which create the illusion known to the movie fan as glamour.

The word could not be applied to her husband, Arthur Cooper, who faces her from the armchair. Yet Arthur is a proper figure of a man, — perhaps too proper. His only fault lies in being almost too perfectly groomed and attired, too faultlessly correct. Arthur is, in fact, the kind of Arthur who is never called Art even by his intimates. A hat and overcoat, specimens of what the well-dressed man is wearing, are laid across a chair and a handsome pigskin bag, just worn enough not to look crude, stands beside it. Arthur is about to start on a journey, but he seems in no hurry to leave.

RENDEZVOUS — AMERICAN STYLE

Zerelda, on the other hand, has begun a series of movements which, in anyone less graceful, might be described as fidgets. She glances nervously at the clock, compares it with her jeweled wrist watch and finally breaks what seems to have been a long silence.

ZERELDA. Shouldn't you be starting, dear?

ARTHUR (*coming out of a brown study*). What? Oh, plenty of time.

ZERELDA (*persistently*). When does your train leave? Ten-twenty?

ARTHUR (*shortly and emphatically*). *There's plenty of time.*

ZERELDA (*with what in anyone less poised would be a pout*). Well! Don't take my head off. I just wondered.

• ARTHUR (*apologetically*). Sorry, dear . . . but do you realize that you've "just wondered" five times since dinner?

ZERELDA (*rising and crossing to stand behind him and stroke his hair with white, red-tipped fingers*). Poor darling! I didn't mean to hurry you. It's . . . just this sitting around waiting. I want you to stay as long as you can, of course.

[ARTHUR turns, seizes her wrist and kisses it.]

ARTHUR. If I stayed until the midnight, would you go with me?

ZERELDA (*with a ripple of laughter*). Darling! I couldn't be ready in that time!

ARTHUR (*his face falling*). Not even with Marie to pack for you?

ZERELDA (*patiently*). But Marie is out, dear. All the servants are out. You know I always give them the evenings off when you go away.

ARTHUR (*frowning*). Yes, I know you do.

ZERELDA. Surely you don't mind!

ARTHUR. Well . . . I don't like your being all alone in the house. All these burglaries lately . . .

RENDEZVOUS — AMERICAN STYLE

ZERELDA (*soothingly*). But I shan't be alone, dear. Pitty-pat will protect me.

[*She reaches into a small dog basket by the fire and produces a surprised but haughty Pekingese sleeve dog, which she fondles.*]

ARTHUR (*with the contempt of all right-minded males for a lap-dog*). That caterpillar!

ZERELDA (*with what in anyone less sophisticated would be a playful squeal*). Pitty! Hear what he calls you! Bite him!

ARTHUR (*thrusting the dog away from his face and looking annoyed*). Couldn't you pack for yourself?

ZERELDA. My dear! Marie has spoiled me for so long I haven't a brain in my head.

ARTHUR (*so eager that he looks almost boyish*). I could help you!

ZERELDA (*reseating herself on the couch and speaking firmly*). Indeed you couldn't! Nobody but Marie packs my things. Besides, there's a committee meeting for the Milk Fund Ball tomorrow morning. I couldn't miss that! Too much of a feather in my social cap!

ARTHUR (*settling back in his chair again*). Well, then, I've a good mind not to go.

ZERELDA (*shocked*). Oh, but you must, Arthur! It's business, isn't it?

ARTHUR (*glumly*). Let it wait.

ZERELDA. But you're going with Leonard, aren't you? You . . . you mustn't let Leonard down.

ARTHUR. Leonard won't mind, — in fact he could attend to the whole thing without me. There's an idea! I'll . . .

ZERELDA. But, Arthur, you mustn't . . .

[*They are interrupted by Leonard, who enters from the door at left. He is a cheery, rather indeterminate person, the typical friend-of-the-family with a touch of perennial bachelor.*]

LEONARD. Hello — hello — hello! I walked right in.

RENDEZVOUS — AMERICAN STYLE

Did you know your front door was unlocked? Rather imprudent with all these hold-ups we're having. Well, Arthur, all set? Taxi waiting outside.

ARTHUR. I'm not sure that I'm going.

ZERELDA. Now, Arthur . . .

LEONARD. Here, what's all this? I thought the whole thing was planned.

ZERELDA (*hurriedly*). It is. Arthur, dear, don't be silly! Can't you see that Leonard is depending on you? Leonard! Don't let Arthur be fanciful!

LEONARD (*perplexed but obliging*). Oh, no, certainly not. Don't be fanciful, Arthur. Come on, the taxi . . .

[*A telephone rings, off stage, right.*]

ZERELDA (*breathlessly*). Oh! That'll be Kate Storey to talk about the plans for the ball. She always takes ages . . . you'll be gone long before I'm back. Good-bye, dearest! Have a good time, even if it is a business trip. Good-by, Leonard! Take good care of him.

[*She embraces Arthur hastily, waves her fingers at Leonard and exits by door at right, taking Pitty-pat with her.*]

LEONARD (*trying to pick up Arthur's bag and hand him his coat at the same time*). Come on, Arthur! That taxi is metered, you know.

ARTHUR (*balking in the middle of the room*). I'm not going.

LEONARD (*bewildered*). But it's all planned. It's the biggest thing we've done since the depression. Good Lord, Arthur, what's got into you?

ARTHUR (*fiercely*). I'll tell you what's got into me. Jealousy!

LEONARD. Wh-what?

ARTHUR. And suspicion!

LEONARD. Eh?

ARTHUR (*mysteriously*). And what's more, I've got good reason.

LEONARD (*becoming interested, as who wouldn't*). You don't say!

RENDEZVOUS — AMERICAN STYLE

ARTHUR (*pacing about*). I do say! What would *you* think if your wife fairly ran you out of the house every time you took a business trip?

LEONARD (*practically*). I don't know. I haven't got a wife.

ARTHUR (*impatiently*). Well, if you had a wife . . . what if she let all the servants go out for the evening and took the latch off the front door?

LEONARD. Oh, was it Zerelda that did that?

ARTHUR. It was off when you came in, wasn't it? That door is always kept locked. The servants are out, and I didn't do it. Use your head!

LEONARD. Well, maybe . . .

ARTHUR (*witheringly*). *Maybe! (Becoming excited.)* She did it, I tell you, — so her lover could get in!

LEONARD. Why, Arthur! Has Zerelda got a lover? I'm surprised. But . . . well, if the servants are all out, what's to prevent her *letting* him in?

ARTHUR (*like a cross-examining lawyer*). You admit, then, that he's coming in?

LEONARD (*somewhat annoyed by his manner*). I admit nothing. Besides, I can't believe it of Zerelda.

ARTHUR (*groaning and sinking into a chair*). My God! Neither could I. Not for a long time. Not until she'd done it again and again and a . . .

LEONARD. Unlocked the door, you mean?

ARTHUR. No, no . . . this is the first time she's done *that*. I mean letting the servants off, being so anxious to get me out of the house.

LEONARD. No real harm in that. Lots of wives like to get their husbands out of the house, I believe.

ARTHUR. But not my wife . . . not Zerelda! (*He groans again.*) At least, I thought not!

LEONARD (*reasonably*). Well, now. . . . Arthur, why should your wife be any different from other wives?

ARTHUR. You ask me that!

LEONARD. Oh, you mean because she used to be a screen

RENDEZVOUS — AMERICAN STYLE

star? (*Reassuringly.*) I wouldn't let that worry me, really I wouldn't. Lots of Hollywood people are quite respectable, I'm told. (*Less positively.*) That is . . . of course, my experience is limited. Zerelda's the only one I ever met, and she stopped acting so soon after she married you. However . . .

ARTHUR. I didn't mean that . . . Yes, I suppose I did. No . . .

[*Pauses to think.*]

LEONARD (*patiently*). Well, take your time. No hurry.

ARTHUR. What I mean is: it's not her having been a star that makes me jealous, yet it *is* her having been a star that's at the root of all the trouble.

LEONARD (*pricking up his ears*). Trouble? I thought you and Zerelda were one of those ideally happy couples.

ARTHUR (*pursuing his own train of thought*). I ought to have known I couldn't hold her. Enough people warned me when I married her.

LEONARD. You've held her pretty successfully for five years.

ARTHUR. Have I, though? God knows I've worked hard enough at it. Len, you don't know, you couldn't know, nobody could know who hadn't gone through it. Oh!

[*Breaks off and sinks head in hands.*]

LEONARD. Gone through what?

ARTHUR (*wildly*). Trying to hold a woman who's had the whole country at her feet for years. Have you ever thought, Len, what it would mean to be the husband of Zerelda Stratton? Going around with her like a faithful dog, waiting in corners, watching her draw men to her like flies to a honey pot? Without effort, mind you, almost, I could swear, without intention! Simply because every move she makes, every word she speaks weaves a sort of magic . . .

LEONARD. Honestly, Arthur, I think you overestimate Zerelda somewhat, really I do. She's a swell girl and

RENDEZVOUS — AMERICAN STYLE

all that, but . . . goodness, *I* never feel in the least like a fly when I'm around her.

ARTHUR (*darkly*). Maybe *you* don't, but there are others. I tell you, Len, she's an alluring woman, and a deep one. Even after five years of marriage, I don't know any more what she's thinking than when I met her. (*In an injured tone.*) Why, that damned Peke she carries around knows more about the back of her mind than I do.

LEONARD. Well, Arthur, I don't know that I blame her. I wouldn't like anyone poking into the back of *my* mind, and I never lived in Hollywood.

ARTHUR (*irritably*). Oh, keep to the point!

LEONARD. Well, isn't that the point? If you really want to know what she's thinking, why don't you ask her?

ARTHUR (*exasperated*). I want to know what's going on in my house!

LEONARD. Oh. Well, if you'd just *say* what you want, maybe I could follow you. Why don't you . . .

ARTHUR (*who has paid no attention*). And, by George, I'm going to find out! Tonight!

LEONARD. But, Arthur, you haven't got time to find out tonight. That taxi—

ARTHUR. Hang that taxi! I'm going to stay here and — and confront them! (*Grimly.*) And you're going to stay with me. I'll want a witness to this.

LEONARD. A witness? I should think a witness would be the last thing . . .

ARTHUR (*with exasperated patience*). To testify in the divorce suit.

LEONARD (*aghast*). Good Heavens, Arthur! Don't get me mixed up in a divorce suit. I — I think I'd better be going.

ARTHUR. You'll stay! Come on, get behind this screen.

LEONARD. Here . . . Arthur, be yourself! Hiding behind screens! Where's your dignity?

ARTHUR (*wildly*). I haven't any.

RENDEZVOUS — AMERICAN STYLE

LEONARD. Well, I have and I won't let you drag me into this.

ARTHUR (*ferociously*). You will if I have to knock you out to drag you into it.

LEONARD. But . . . screens, Arthur, screens! So trite! Like a French farce! Like a Viennese comedy!

ARTHUR. There's no comedy about this. And if you don't stay there may be a tragedy.

LEONARD. My word, you *are* strung up! Oh, well . . . we've missed the train by now, I suppose. I could stay over until the next one . . . if it weren't for that taxi.

ARTHUR. I'll pay the damned taxi!

LEONARD. Well, of course, if it means all that to you . . . All right! Here, take your coat and bag, too. May as well do it right, if we must do it.

[The two men step behind the screen at right, which hides them from the rest of the stage but not from the audience. They are scarcely there before Zerelda's voice is heard, off stage, coming nearer.]

ZERELDA. Darling! Darling! We're alone at last! Isn't it too heavenly? Come, we'll lie on the couch together.

[Leonard with difficulty restrains Arthur from bursting into the open. He points to the crack between the panels of the screen and Arthur applies his eye to it, registering amazement as Zerelda enters alone. At least we assume it is Zerelda, though nothing but her voice would tell us so. She has changed from the clinging chiffon gown to a flannel wrapper of venerable appearance and shapeless bulges, her feet are shod in broad sheepskin moccasins with plenty of wool showing about the tops, and most of the make-up and all the jewelry has been removed. She carries Pitty-pat under one arm, two bottles of beer under the other and in her hands a small tray with a glass and a supply of crackers and cheese. Setting the bottles and tray on the coffee table, she casts herself on the couch, holding the little dog to her breast.]

RENDEZVOUS — AMERICAN STYLE

ZERELDA. Pitty-pat, I'm tired . . . I'm exhausted . . . I'm practically dead! (*She stretches and sighs, then relaxes.*) Never mind, Bunny, you and I are going to have some nice fattening beer and good, nourishing crackers and cheese. (*She opens one of the bottles and pours beer, talking all the time.*) You know, angel, there was one awful moment when I thought he really wasn't going. . . . My heart stood still! (*She takes a large gulp of beer.*) Three months since the last trip . . . *three months!* I couldn't have stood it much longer. I'd have had to go away myself. But where could I go? If I went on a trip, he'd notify all his friends — he has such loads of friends, almost everywhere! And his friends would arrange more parties for me. God, but I'm sick of parties! And I couldn't hide in a hotel right here in New York. If he found out, he'd never understand. He'd be hurt, or maybe suspicious. I couldn't bear for him to be hurt or suspicious, ducky. (*She takes another pull at the beer.*) But, oh, Pitty-pat, I can't keep this up much longer! I'll be forty on my next birthday. Forty! (*She droops a moment.*) I wouldn't mind so much if everyone knew it, but that darned publicity man kept me twenty-seven so long! (*She droops again.*) Oh, darling, I thought when I retired everything would be so different. I thought life would be as easy as an old shoe. (*She holds up one foot, staring sardonically at the moccasin.*) I guess I didn't know so much about men after all, darling, at least the kind of men that marry movie stars, and want to keep them twinkling, and take them around and show them off and — Oh, Pitty, I haven't relaxed for five years! Except for these business trips, — these blessed, heavenly business trips. (*She sits up, spreads a cracker with cheese and eats greedily.*) Want a piece, darling? Good, isn't it? But fattening. We can't do it often. Think of those calories! (*She spreads another cracker.*) Oh, dear, just to be myself, not to care any more whether I held

RENDEZVOUS — AMERICAN STYLE

him or not . . . that *would* simplify life! Sometimes, lambie, I almost wish I could get over loving him. But I can't. (*Dreamily.*) He's so dear, simply perfect. Too perfect! (*Indignantly.*) Never a button out of place, even on his pajamas! I never realized a human being could be so inhumanly neat. I'll bet his hair stays parted in the shower! Would you believe it, sweetheart, I've never dared rumple his hair? Not in five years! All I do is *stroke* it — ugh! — just the way I stroked Rupert Tyler's in that last picture. (*She is almost crying now.*) But that's what he likes, Pitty-pat, that's what he wants, and I'm such a fool about the man, I'd do anything he wanted, anything! (*She has become quite dramatic, in spite of the handicapping wrapper. Now she smiles, somewhat sheepishly.*) Well, almost anything! I didn't go with him tonight, did I? (*Her mood changes, she laughs and tosses the dog over her head.*) No, precious, not tonight. We're here alone tonight, and it's our night to howl! (*She puts down the dog and opens a cigarette box on the table.*) You do the howling, big boy, while I have a cigarette. Oh, damn, the box is empty. Wait a minute, sweet. (*Rises and settles the dog among the cushions.*) Wait for Mama and don't touch! I'll be right back.

[*She goes off through door at right. Arthur, whose face has been a kaleidoscope of varying emotions, stares stupefied at Leonard, who is doubled over with suppressed laughter.*

LEONARD (*with difficulty*). Did you say this was no comedy?

ARTHUR (*blankly*). Well, I'll be damned! (*He recovers himself and does some rapid thinking.*) Here! Let's get out before she comes back.

LEONARD. What! Aren't you going to confront them?

ARTHUR (*his own man again and laughing, too.*) I know what I'm going to do, all right, but you're not in on this

RENDEZVOUS — AMERICAN STYLE

act. (*He gives Leonard a push toward door at left.*)

Go on and catch your train.

LEONARD (*wiping his eyes*). All right, all right, I'll go.

But if you don't tell me later what happens, I'll probably have a stroke. (*Goes out at door left, pausing on the threshold.*) Remember, I'm charging that taxi to you.

[*Arthur takes bag and overcoat and follows him, just before Zerelda returns with a package of cigarettes.*]

ZERELDA (*struggling with cellophane*). Here we are!

Good little fellow . . . you didn't steal a thing. (*Lights a cigarette and blows a hearty cloud of smoke.*) Lord, what a satisfaction to smoke without that jade blow-pipe! (*She settles down by the fire, drawing the dressing gown around her.*) Good old flannel! The first time I've been warm today!

[*In a moment Arthur enters and Zerelda starts up wildly. But this is a changed Arthur, collarless and arrayed in a parti-colored bathrobe suggestive of a Beano prize at the county fair.*]

ZERELDA. You!

ARTHUR (*sitting down in the corner of the couch and drawing a disreputable pipe and tobacco pouch from his pocket*). Yes, me.

ZERELDA. You didn't go?

ARTHUR (*quizzically*). Well, what do you think?

ZERELDA. I . . . don't know. I . . . (*Breaks off and looks curiously at the bathrobe.*) Arthur, where did you get that . . . that *thing* you have on?

ARTHUR (*belligerently*). What's the matter with it? This is a good old friend. (*Pats the robe affectionately.*) I've had it for years.

ZERELDA. B-but I've never seen it before.

ARTHUR. No, I've kept it hidden. I had to — or thought I had to — wear that infernal Japanese kimono thing you gave me, with the sleeves that get in the breakfast butter.

RENDEZVOUS — AMERICAN STYLE

ZERELDA. B-but I thought you liked the kimono.

ARTHUR. I do, I do. But I like this better.

[*Zerelda stands in the middle of the floor in stunned silence. Arthur, having got his pipe going, pours out more beer.*]

ARTHUR. Mind if I drink out of your glass? Look here, we may as well have this out. That's what I — ah — thought, when I decided not to go tonight. (*Grins, as though appreciating a hidden joke.*) Sit down, won't you, it's easier to talk, somehow.

[*Zerelda, moving like a sleepwalker, seats herself on the edge of the armchair.*]

ARTHUR (*leaning forward and speaking earnestly*). For five long years, five happy years, mind you, but long years just the same, I've been trying to live up to America's No. 1 Glamour Girl. The most exquisite, the most intriguing woman I'd ever seen, off the screen or on. At first it seemed like a dream, too good to be true. And after a while it *was* too good to be true. (*Leans back with an air of finality.*) Zerelda, I can't keep it up! (*Zerelda stares in dismay, gradually gathering confidence as he goes on.*) I never lived like this before I married you; my people never lived like this, and I don't like it. I don't mind the big house and the butler and the cook and the maids and the chauffeur, though they do get under foot a bit; I don't mind the constant coming and going and entertaining. But what I can't stick is this being everlastingly on dress parade, even with each other, like two incredible people in a movie. My God! sometimes I can almost hear the cameras click.

ZERELDA. B-but I thought . . .

ARTHUR. Zerelda, I suppose I love you as deeply as any man ever loved a woman, but I tell you, I came back to tell you, that unless I can have an evening at home, now and then, in my old clothes, with a pipe and a book and a bottle of beer in front of the fire, I'm going to be a fit subject for a strait-jacket.

RENDEZVOUS — AMERICAN STYLE

ZERELDA (*wonderingly*). You came back to — to tell me *that*?

ARTHUR. Well, I came back to have things out, even if it cost us our happiness. (*He grins suddenly.*) And I found you wallowing in guilty splendor.

ZERELDA (*remembering her clothes for the first time and starting up*). Oh! (*Guiltily.*) I was just . . . just relaxing.

ARTHUR (*holding out his hand*). Let's relax together.

ZERELDA (*still self-conscious*). But I look a perfect *sight*!

ARTHUR (*catching her hand*). You look beautiful. You look lovelier than I've ever seen you.

ZERELDA. I must!

ARTHUR. You look real; you look restful, the kind of wife a tired husband feels at home with.

ZERELDA (*sitting on the arm of the couch and speaking softly*). And are you a tired husband?

ARTHUR (*resting his forehead against her arm*). Don't I look it?

ZERELDA (*smiling*). You look like the kind of husband a tired wife could rest with.

ARTHUR (*invitingly*). Or against?

ZERELDA (*shaking her head*). There's still something wrong with the picture. Your hair . . .

[*She rumples it energetically.*]

ARTHUR. You know, I've always wanted you to do that. All you've ever given me is snaky little strokes out of a film drama. You'll never know how cheated I felt on our honeymoon.

ZERELDA (*rumples his hair again and laughing*). Well, the honeymoon is over, but . . .

ARTHUR. Is it?

[*He gives an undignified tug and she topples into his lap with the moccasins waving wildly. They both burst into uproarious laughter.*]

Curtain

-

**SATURDAY NIGHT AT THE
HALFWAY HOUSE**

**By
W. BRANCH JOHNSON**

Copyright, 1940, by Samuel French.

CAST

THE ARCHANGEL MICHAEL.

THE SOUL OF RONAN KEROVIC.

SATAN.

THE MASTER.

SCENE. The interior of the Halfway House, between Paradise and Hell.

NOTE. It is essential that this play should be presented with absolute seriousness and purpose. It is founded upon the belief of a simple and deeply religious people and attempts to enter into their spirit. To present it otherwise than with sincerity and simplicity would be unworthy of them.

SATURDAY NIGHT AT THE HALFWAY HOUSE

The curtain rises on complete darkness. A gust of wind is heard to moan across the stage. Then the lights flood slowly up, revealing the interior of the inn known as the Halfway House. There is the usual inn counter, up right, a table with three chairs center, and benches round the walls. Everything, including the inn itself, is of dark, oak-like wood; the effect to be aimed at is one of stark rusticity without the least attempt at sophisticated "attractiveness." A door is left on back wall, and another door down right. In the middle of the back wall is a large painted notice, "Master's Next Visit" with "Tonight" written in chalk beneath it. Behind the counter are a few bottles and a big cider cask.

Evidently the inn has been recently occupied by a considerable gathering of people. Benches and chairs are in some disorder and there are numerous used glasses on table and counter. The Archangel Michael is tidying up the room, humming as he does so and not hurrying himself greatly.

Another gust of wind. It is followed by a wail of terrible distress and a diabolical laugh from off right. Michael purses his lips and shakes his head as he goes about his business.

MICHAEL. Ah, dear me! Another soul for Satan, I'm afraid. Well, it's always like that on a Saturday night nowadays — about a quarter for the Master, half for Satan and the rest left to wander in outer darkness. I can't think what the world's coming to!

[Continues tidying. The door up left opens and the Soul of Ronan Kerouac enters timidly. A gust of wind as he does so.

SATURDAY NIGHT AT THE HALFWAY HOUSE

SOUL. Am I . . . I mean, is this . . . ?

MICHAEL. Ah, there you are. I've been expecting you.
Come in.

SOUL. Is this the Halfway House?

MICHAEL. It is.

SOUL. And is it Saturday night? I've got confused since I died and don't know what day it is or where I am or anything.

MICHAEL. Yes, it's Saturday night all right. But you're only just in time. The Master would have left in another five minutes or so.

SOUL. Then it really is true, what we say in Brittany?

MICHAEL. That the Master comes here every Saturday night to choose which souls he will take back with him to Paradise? Perfectly true.

SOUL. I'm glad of that. A bit afraid too, perhaps. Would you mind telling me where this place is?

MICHAEL. Didn't you see the signpost outside the door?

SOUL. My eyes aren't what they used to be. And this blue mist that hangs about everywhere — it's a plaguy nuisance. I've been stumbling about for days, it seems — it's bad for rheumatism! Blue mist everywhere — not grey, as it is in Brittany. Besides, I shouldn't have been looking for a signpost anyway.

MICHAEL. Well, it says — Paradise (*pointing left*) and . . .

[*Pointing right.*]

SOUL. And?

MICHAEL. I leave you to guess.

[*Another diabolical laugh from off right. Soul makes for the door by which it entered.*]

SOUL. Oh my God, oh my God!

MICHAEL. There, there, don't be afraid. It's all right, now. (*He pilots him gently to chair left of table.*) That blue mist has got you a bit nervous, that's all. A glass of cider will soon make you feel better. (*Goes on*

SATURDAY NIGHT AT THE HALFWAY HOUSE

talking as he fetches one from counter.) You see, it's perfectly true that the Master comes here on a Saturday night. But so does Satan — oh, yes! All the same, you mustn't jump to conclusions. Everything's done aboveboard — no hole and corner business or anything of that sort. Everyone has his say, fair and square. And believe me, the Master is all he's made out to be on earth.

SOUL. Oh dear, I hope not!

MICHAEL. Hope not?

SOUL. I mean, there's folks that make him out full of anger and wrath and revenge. Precious little different from Satan, it seems to me.

MICHAEL. But it's not folks like yourself who say that?

SOUL. Bless me, no! Although, of course, people like me have got to believe what we're told by them as know better.

MICHAEL. Perhaps, perhaps. Well, we'd best get the formalities over.

[Brings large black-bound book from counter. A gust of wind but slighter than previous ones.]

SOUL. What are you going to do with that book?

MICHAEL. Only check up on St. Peter. It's his book, you know, but he sends it down here on a Saturday with a list of the week's deaths. That's how I came to be expecting you.

SOUL. I don't trust people who write in books. They want to get something out of you — taxes, generally. But sometimes it's other things. And they get 'em, what's more.

MICHAEL. Nobody's going to get anything out of you this time.

SOUL. That's what they all say.

MICHAEL. You can take my word. But before we start — another glass of cider?

[Fetches one.]

SOUL. Well, I won't say no. Though it isn't good for

SATURDAY NIGHT AT THE HALFWAY HOUSE

my rheumatism. But seeing as how I don't feel quite at home here yet . . .

MICHAEL. There, there, what is there to be afraid of, now? (*Returning to book.*) Your name on earth?

SOUL. Do you really promise you're not trying to get something out of me?

MICHAEL. Absolutely.

SOUL. Ronan Kerouic.

MICHAEL (*running down index of book*). Kerouic . . . Kerouic (*Finding it.*) Kerouic. Alphonse . . . Jouan . . . Pierre . . . ah, here we are — Ronan. Folio two hundred and fifty-nine. (*Turning to page.*) Now we'll check up. Ronan Kerouic. Of?

SOUL. D'you want me to spell it? Because I can't.

MICHAEL. H'm. I'm pretty good on Breton names generally, but this certainly is a tongue-twister. Plou . . . Plou (*He makes an indeterminate noise, ending with the sound "aiou."*) Anything like that?

SOUL (*doubtfully*). Something.

MICHAEL. Well, it's the best I can manage. Age at death?

SOUL. Sixty-seven. Or was it sixty-eight? I could never be sure.

MICHAEL. Occupation on earth?

SOUL. Coastwise fisherman — till the rheumatism got me.

MICHAEL. And after that?

SOUL. Just hanging about, waiting to die.

MICHAEL. Married or single?

SOUL (*a little glumly*). Married.

MICHAEL (*putting aside book*). Yes, that seems correct. Don't forget your cider, will you?

[*Slight moan of wind. The door down right bursts open and Satan enters with a swagger.*]

SATAN. Well, well, well, an excellent evening, Michael — the best for weeks. A glass of cider, please.

MICHAEL. Is the Master coming too?

SATAN. I left him lecturing a bunch of souls that are be-

SATURDAY NIGHT AT THE HALFWAY HOUSE

ing sent into outer darkness until they can make up their minds. He's great on lecturing. (*Sees Soul.*) Hello, what's this?

SOUL (*he has risen, his beret is off and he crosses himself repeatedly and frantically*). O Lord! O Lord God! Almighty Father!

SATAN. I wish you'd stop doing that. Stop it, for goodness' sake!

SOUL. Almighty God, dear Master, they said you'd be wonderful, they said you'd be awe-inspiring. But I didn't think you'd be as wonderful and awe-inspiring as this.

SATAN. What does the fellow want, Michael?

MICHAEL. He's a late arrival, that's all. Lost his way, he says.

SATAN. Well, well, well, so you've come to be judged, have you, little soul? Well, you can rely on fair play here, can't he, Michael? We'll let him make out the best case he can for himself — then I'll take him along with me. Yes, I will, little soul, never fear. That's why I come here every Saturday night, isn't it, Michael?

SOUL. Thank you, Lord God, a thousand thanks. It's a million times more than I have dared to hope. And when I heard from that gentleman (*Indicating Michael.*) that Satan was on the premises too . . .

SATAN. So you heard that, did you?

SOUL. Yes, and I was mortal agitated. (*The door down right opens and the Master, a little disconsolate, enters unobserved by the Soul. He goes to counter, gets a glass of cider from Michael and stands slowly drinking it while he watches Soul with a dawning smile.*) I've faced a few dangers in my time without being afraid, but I should have been afraid then, sure enough, if I hadn't known that you were at hand to protect and shelter me from his fiery breath and cloven hoof and serpent's tongue and hands like claws — and most of all, from Hell fire, which he was bound to take me to. Yes, I

SATURDAY NIGHT AT THE HALFWAY HOUSE

should have been afraid, certain sure, but for you, Lord God. It was you that gave me courage, because I've been praying hard to you all the time. Not but what this gentleman (*Indicating Michael.*) hasn't been very kind.

MASTER (*coming to Soul*). More cider?

SOUL. I've had two already. Hadn't we better ask the gentleman?

MASTER (*smilingly to Michael*). May he, Michael?

MICHAEL. Well, in the circumstances, perhaps.

[*The Master passes the Soul a glass.*]

SOUL. It's fine stuff they give you here — free too, seemingly. (*To Satan.*) In all reverence, to your eternal health, Lord God Almighty.

SATAN (*drily*). Thank you. I don't often get encomiums of that sort.

MASTER. And to your health too, good soul.

SOUL. And yours. I seem to know your face, somehow.

MASTER. You I know quite well, Ronan Kerouic.

SOUL. That was my name. What was yours?

MASTER. Michael, some pipes and some good strong tobacco — some of your best.

SOUL. What, do they sell tobacco here too?

MASTER. They give it.

SATAN (*shivering*). It's the only dealings with fire they have in this place.

MASTER (*politely but firmly*). I'm sorry if you find it chilly. Won't you sit down?

SATAN. Sit or be pushed, I suppose.

[*Sits left of table. Michael brings pipes and tobacco, handing one to the Master and the other to the Soul. He retires behind the counter, lights a pipe for himself and settles down with a newspaper.*]

MASTER (*sitting above table*). A glass of cider and a pipe — what more can you want!

SOUL. I wish I could remember where I've seen you before.

SATURDAY NIGHT AT THE HALFWAY HOUSE

MASTER. Perhaps it'll come back to you. Look, here's a chair. (*Soul sits right of table. The Master puts on a pair of horn-rimmed spectacles and consults St. Peter's book, which Michael has left lying open. Reading.*) Yes . . . yes . . . yes. Well, it sounds quite simple. Suppose we open the proceedings.

SOUL (*discovering his error*). But . . . you!

MASTER (*kindly*). It was a mistake that anybody might have made. Forget it.

SATAN (*mimicking Soul*). "O God, O Lord God! And when I heard that Satan was on the premises . . ."

MASTER. Quiet, Satan. Don't forget that you are here only on sufferance.

SOUL. I don't know what to say.

MASTER. Then say nothing, my friend. It's usually better.

SOUL. But I'm that ashamed! Oh, dear Master, forgive me.

MASTER. What have I to forgive you for?

SOUL. For not behaving respectful towards you.

MASTER. Obsequiously, you mean. Why should you? If I created you, you created me. So we're all in the family, so to speak.

SOUL. That's it. We're friendly together. Yet I did mistake him (*Jerking his thumb at Satan.*) for you, didn't I? I don't know what to make of that.

SATAN (*echoing the Master*). Suppose we open the proceedings. That was what you said, wasn't it? Don't forget I've a bunch in the next room waiting to come along with me. They'll be getting impatient and kicking the place to bits.

MASTER. Don't remind me. Why do you have such literally infernal luck, Satan?

SATAN (*complacently*). My legal winnings and small thanks to you.

MASTER. Small thanks to me? Yes. It's the beastly hypocrisy of men that delivers them into your hands

SATURDAY NIGHT AT THE HALFWAY HOUSE

rather than mine. Take this evening, for instance. I was forced to give you the philanthropist because his philanthropy was nothing but a cloak to cover his sense of power. I was forced to give you the politician, because he persisted in maintaining that he wanted nothing more than to leave the world better than he had found it. I was forced to give you the drunkard when he dared to declare that he got drunk because my blood was in the wine. And so on. I wonder how long it will take men to realise that a good honest sin is far less displeasing to me than one that has been camouflaged to look like a virtue. Nine times out of ten you win on the camouflage, Satan. (*Pulling himself together.*) To business!

[*Examines St. Peter's book.*]

SATAN. Do I propose a vote of thanks to the lecturer?

MASTER (*to Soul*). I'll read you St. Peter's summing up.

(*Reads.*) There is nothing worthy of special mention in the life of Ronan Kerouic. It has been typical of the life of the fisherman — hard-worked, not without danger, full of poverty and privation. He has faced it with some courage, many failures and a great deal of patience and resignation. If there are few credit entries to his account, there are also few debit ones. A life completely inconspicuous. . . . Well, it might be worse, you know.

SATAN. There's nothing in it; just negative, useless to either of us.

MASTER. That we must find out. The entries, both credit and debit, are certainly small — trifling, in fact. And I should say that, roughly speaking, they balance out. (*Calculating.*) Yes, just about.

SATAN. But not exactly?

MASTER. Not absolutely exactly.

SATAN. Oh? Not absolutely exactly?

MASTER. I'm afraid not. To be perfectly frank, there's a slight margin in your favor. But it's only very slight.

SATAN. Here, let me look. (*Calculating also.*) Very

SATURDAY NIGHT AT THE HALFWAY HOUSE

slight indeed! (*To Soul.*) You'd better get ready to come with me.

MASTER. Gently, Satan, gently. Let's examine this a little more. (*To Soul.*) Now I'm going to ask you one or two questions, Ronan Kerouic. Answer them as truthfully as you can, won't you?

SOUL. There's nothing I want better, dear Master.

SATAN (*to Master*). And none of those artful leading questions of yours, either.

MASTER. Ronan Kerouic, did you while on earth always hold me in your heart to the best of your ability?

SOUL. That's a very difficult question to answer, dear Master.

MASTER. It shouldn't be, you know.

SOUL. I suppose not. But somehow . . . you see . . .

SATAN. Obviously he didn't.

SOUL. Well, if I've got to tell the truth — not always. Sometimes I did a lot. But more often it slipped my memory.

SATAN. On the other hand, were you or were you not in the habit of naming the name of the Master blasphemously? Yes or no?

SOUL. Must I answer, dear Master?

MASTER. I'm afraid so. We must give Satan his due.

SATAN. Out with it. Yes or no?

SOUL. Well, at sea sometimes, I expect . . .

SATAN. I'm not interested in what you expect. Answer the question.

SOUL. Well, I expect I was, in a sort of way, like most other men I knew, not meaning anything by it.

SATAN. A blasphemer! Second point to me. (*To Master.*) Now your turn.

MASTER. Ronan Kerouic, did you while on earth exploit a fellow man to your own profit and his disadvantage?

SOUL. There's a lot of long words in that.

SATAN. I object to the question. The man was as poor as a church mouse himself, so how could he exploit any-

SATURDAY NIGHT AT THE HALFWAY HOUSE

body? Don't try to sneak a point by making a virtue out of what he couldn't do anyhow.

MASTER. May I put it in another way? Did you ever act unfairly to anyone or in a fashion I should not approve?

SOUL. Not knowingly I didn't.

MASTER. You don't recollect a single occasion?

SOUL. I expect there were some but I've forgotten 'em. Wait a minute though. Once I promised to work for four hours for a neighbor of mine but did the job in three and a half and went home. Would you call that unfair?

MASTER. If that is all . . .

SATAN. Not so fast. (*To Soul.*) You say you never acted unfairly to anyone. Why didn't you?

SOUL. Didn't want to particularly.

SATAN. Now be careful. Is that the only reason?

SOUL. Mostly. But of course, a man in my position's easy found out. It's only the rich that can afford to be unfair and grasping.

SATAN. You see? Fear—and envy. Another clear point to me, I think.

MASTER. You need not insist. I'm keeping my own reckoning, thank you. (*To Soul.*) Ronan Kerouic, did you ever while on earth go back on your word?

SOUL. Lots of times, dear Master, lots and lots of times.

SATAN. I don't insist, of course, but . . .

[*Holds up four fingers.*]

MASTER (*concealing his disappointment*). Ronan Kerouic, did you while on earth ever come to the succor of a fellow human being, to help to turn his soul towards me?

SOUL. Not that I remember.

MASTER (*a little exasperated*). But think, man . . .

SATAN. No prompting, please.

MASTER. In all your hundreds of voyages to the fishing grounds, for instance?

SATURDAY NIGHT AT THE HALFWAY HOUSE

SOUL. When anybody was washed overboard, as happened sometimes . . .

MASTER. Well?

SOUL. We were all glad it wasn't us. But I don't know that I ever did anything special . . . Except once, perhaps.

MASTER. Ah! And that once?

SOUL. It was a very bad night and we'd had to cut most of our nets adrift. There was one of my mates got hit by the boom and knocked out. Just at that moment she took a sea green over the bows, and I clung to a stay with one arm while I grabbed my mate with the other.

MASTER. Yes?

SOUL. That's all.

MASTER. You saved his life, in fact?

SOUL. Not exactly. I don't think he was in any particular danger, really. You see, he was safe up against the deckhouse. But what I meant was, I should have been ready to save him if he had been in danger.

[Satan titters, then laughs aloud.]

MASTER *(reproving him)*. The readiness is all.

SATAN. Don't quote Shakespeare. It's a form of intellectual snobbery. And anyway, I know quite as much about Shakespeare as you do.

MASTER. There are even certain passages in Holy Scripture that you know as much about as I do. *(To Soul.)* Ronan Kerouic, there are certain very dull and prosaic sins . . . drunkenness, for example. Were you ever drunk?

SOUL. Oh, dear Master . . .

MASTER. Were you, Ronan?

SOUL. I promised to be truthful, dear Master . . .

MASTER. Go on, Ronan.

SOUL. Seeing that I've promised to be truthful, I wouldn't like to say . . .

SATAN. Because you can't.

SOUL. . . . that I hadn't *ever* been drunk.

SATURDAY NIGHT AT THE HALFWAY HOUSE

MASTER. How often, Ronan?

SOUL. Whenever I came back from the fishing grounds. There's warmth and comfort in being drunk, dear Master — it makes you feel twice the man you are when you're sober. You feel very small at sea, with only a fishing boat between you and so much water, and there's always a tiny fear tugging at your heart. And on land you're a nobody — just one among millions. Everyone has to feel important sometimes, dear Master, and brandy's a quicker way than most others — especially on an empty stomach.

SATAN (*blandly*). Do I score another point?

MASTER (*after a sigh of disappointment*). There is also a more delicate question — the question of fornication.

SOUL. No, dear Master, I've never done that, never.

SATAN. Not with the women of his own village; I've seen some of 'em!

MASTER. You have never coveted your neighbor's wife?

SOUL. Never, never. I'm positive of that.

[*Master brightens perceptibly.*]

SATAN. Now listen to me, my man. I've a feeling that you're on slippery ground. Leaving your neighbor's wife aside for the moment . . .

SOUL. I don't know that there's anybody.

SATAN. Ah, not so positive this time, eh? Why don't you say "never, never" as you did before?

SOUL. Because . . .

SATAN. You need not tell me. I know.

SOUL. Well, if you know, I suppose . . .

SATAN. Now we're getting at something.

SOUL. A man doesn't go through life without all sorts of ideas coming to him. And when he spends most of his life at sea, there's one thing more than another he wants when he comes back, and I'm not ashamed to say so. Only sometimes it gets the better of him, if he isn't careful.

SATAN. If he isn't careful. Were you always careful?

SATURDAY NIGHT AT THE HALFWAY HOUSE

SOUL. I never did more than think. And I didn't think more than I could help.

SATAN. Will you swear to that?

SOUL. If you want me to.

SATAN (*to Master*). There's no doubt the man's a liar. Still, I can afford to be generous. One point to you.

MASTER. Ronan Kerouic, there is the commonest sin of all — and the least recognized as a sin by mankind. Had you the smallest care for the loveliness of the world about you?

SOUL. Don't know that I saw any reason for having.

MASTER. Not for the world I had made? Did nothing at all thrill you with its beauty?

SOUL. There were evenings when the sea was pretty. But that generally meant bad weather afterwards, so I didn't think particular much of it.

MASTER. And on land?

SOUL. Not in our village. I was too used to it to notice much. Except when there was a good crop of onions. That meant onion soup, which we all liked.

MASTER (*in disappointment*). Nothing more, Ronan?

SOUL. Only when I was drunk. Things looked different then.

SATAN (*to Master, patronizingly*). Did you really, in your ineffable wisdom, create the poor and then expect them to bother about such things as beauty — with a capital B? Really, there are moments when you astonish me.

MASTER. It's not poverty or riches that make for a love of beauty, Satan. The rich are blind through greed and lust of power. The poor are blind through economic necessity. But there are always exceptions. And those exceptions are the salt of the earth.

SATAN (*growing restless*). Anyhow, there's nothing exceptional about this fellow. When I said he was negative I underestimated. He's a blasphemer, a coward, a drunkard and a liar. He envies those who are better off

SATURDAY NIGHT AT THE HALFWAY HOUSE

than himself. If he hasn't committed fornication it's because he wasn't man enough to. And now you discover he's a clod. Well . . .

MASTER. I must confess . . .

SATAN. Of course you must. Don't you think you'd best give him to me gracefully, before you're forced to?

MASTER. Ronan Kerouic! Oh, Ronan Kerouic!

SOUL. Oh, dear Master, I'd do anything to help you.

MASTER. But you must help yourself, man.

SATAN. Cut the cackle. I'm tired.

MASTER. So am I. But I mustn't give up yet.

SATAN. You know you're only playing for time. And I've that bunch waiting in the next room. I do wish you'd be reasonable.

MASTER (*examining St. Peter's book again*). There's one thing we've completely missed, Ronan. I see you were married.

SOUL. I was. She died seven years back.

MASTER. Did you love and cherish her?

SOUL. Never thought about it more than I could help.

SATAN (*patiently*). You've drawn another blank, you see.

SOUL. She had a tongue — I've never heard anything like it. I had to lay a strap across her back many a time, in order to get a little peace.

SATAN. Wife beating! Come on, you can't stand out against that, you know.

SOUL. She could nag all night and all day when the fit was on her. Something terrible it was to listen to. There were times . . .

MASTER (*almost in despair*). Must you continue?

SOUL. When I remember some of the names she's called me and some of the things she's said to me — and about me . . .

MASTER. Please, please!

SOUL. Sometimes she'd throw things and sometimes she'd

SATURDAY NIGHT AT THE HALFWAY HOUSE

just nag and nag and nag. If I didn't murder her it's only because . . .

MASTER (*desperately*). Ronan Kerouic, do you want to go to Hell, to the place of torment and damnation?

SOUL. No, no, no! Oh, dear Master, don't send me to Hell! Save me from Hell! I don't want to go to Hell!

MASTER. Ronan Kerouic, you are on the brink of it.

SOUL. Save me, dear Master, I beg you to save me!

MASTER. Then say not one word more about your wife.

SOUL. But you wouldn't let me finish.

SATAN. Let him finish by all means.

SOUL. It's true she was a nagger — as true as I'm sitting here. She was the finest nagger I've ever set eyes on. Many's the time I've wanted to murder her — it's my belief she wanted you to want to. She'd feel happy then. But there were other times, mind you, when she could be a perfect angel, after her own fashion. Angel was her name, too — Angélique.

SATAN. Angélique?

SOUL. That's right.

SATAN. Angélique? Angélique Kerouic? Well, if that isn't the best joke of a lifetime!

[*Goes off into roars of laughter.*]

SOUL. I never saw anything to laugh at in Angélique.

SATAN. Angélique Kerouic! Oh my! Hold me, hold me up, someone!

[*Still roaring with laughter.*]

SOUL (*the truth dawning on him*). I think I understand.

Oh, Master, dear Master, I'm afraid.

MASTER. Of what, my son?

SOUL. Of Hell and torment and damnation. Oh, dear Master, must I?

MASTER. I had not said so.

SOUL. But Angélique's there, isn't she?

SATAN. Nagging the life out of everybody.

SOUL. Then I must go to her. I don't forget she had a

SATURDAY NIGHT AT THE HALFWAY HOUSE

lot to put up with on earth — every fisherman's wife does, you know, what with poverty and loneliness. I mustn't leave her again.

MASTER. So you would go to Hell to be with her?

SOUL. I must, dear Master. I couldn't stand Paradise, even if you thought I was fit for it — not when I knew I'd left Angélique in Hell and hadn't done anything.

MASTER. Do you know what Hell is like?

SOUL. Don't tell me, please. I'd rather not know.

MASTER. But, Ronan . . .

SOUL. Don't tell me, I say. I can face it better if I don't know.

SATAN. Well, if you're ready, into the next room, please.

SOUL (*after a tense pause*). I'm ready.

[*He walks a few steps towards the door down right.*]

MASTER. Stop.

SATAN. Now what's the matter?

MASTER. I must have a minute to think this out. It's rather new in my experience.

SATAN (*angrily*). Don't waste time. I'm in a hurry.

MICHAEL (*coming from behind counter*). A glass of cider before you go?

SATAN. A quick one, then. (*With cider.*) Here's to the newest recruit. Now at last we shall have some peace in Hell.

MASTER. That's it! You've given me an idea. You shall have some peace in Hell. You shall have Hell without Angélique Kerouic.

SATAN (*restored to cheerfulness*). It'll be a bit lonely for . . .

[*Jerks thumb at Soul.*]

MASTER. No, he won't be lonely.

SATAN. What do you mean?

MASTER. I'm sorry, Satan, but I'm going to deprive you of your new recruit, as you call him. A man who will go voluntarily to Hell for the sake of a nagging wife is not worthy of you.

SATURDAY NIGHT AT THE HALFWAY HOUSE

SATAN. Oh, yes, he is. For being a damned fool.

MASTER. Ronan Kerouic comes with me. And Angélique too.

SATAN. I don't mind about Angélique — in fact I shall be glad to get rid of her. But this fellow's mine and I mean to have him.

MASTER. Even in Paradise things may not be easy for him — at any rate, at first. I can do most things, but I can't cure a nagging tongue in a moment. It takes time. But for Ronan's sake, and with Ronan's help, I'm going to try.

SATAN. That's not my affair. The fellow comes with me.

MASTER. He does not.

SATAN. But damn it, he offered to. It isn't one in a million that does that.

MASTER. He did.

SATAN. Well then . . .

[Seizes arm of Soul and begins to drag him off.]

MASTER. At your peril, Satan.

SATAN. What now?

MASTER. It is true that he offered to go to Hell. But I did not give my consent.

[Master and Satan glare at each other in a tussle of wills. At length Satan relinquishes arm of Soul and gets out another cigar.]

SATAN (*trying to carry off his defeat with a high hand*).
Well, well, well!

SOUL. Then I'm not going to Hell?

MASTER. You are coming with me, Ronan Kerouic, to Paradise — and Angélique. And your place in Paradise shall be an honored one.

SOUL. Oh, Master, dear Master, thank you a thousand times, thank you more times than I can say.

SATAN. So you've made up your mind?

MASTER. Quite. And you will not change it, Satan.

SATAN. Then let me tell you this. You think yourself clever, don't you? Well, next week I'll get even with

SATURDAY NIGHT AT THE HALFWAY HOUSE

you. You see if I don't. I'll make you so sorry for yourself that you'll never set foot inside the Halfway House again. See?

MASTER. Your philanthropist, your drunkard, your politician and several others are in the next room, as you have more than once reminded us. A good host does not keep his guests waiting.

SATAN (*pausing to light cigar*). Well, my friend, I'll take good care Angélique doesn't forget the lessons she learned with us.

[*Exits right, banging door after him.*]

MASTER. He'll be gone in a second. (*Clap of thunder.*) There he goes. An unpleasant fellow — though perhaps more misguided than anything else. Michael!

MICHAEL. Coming, Master.

MASTER. Michael, sit down here for a moment. (*Michael sits on edge of table.*) I want your advice, Michael. If you were a fisherman who was about to meet his wife in Paradise, what do you think you would ask for in the way of comforts?

MICHAEL. Well, in the first place, I think I should ask for a well-built and snug little house where we could be together.

MASTER. A really comfortable little house, you mean.

MICHAEL. Quite close to the sea.

MASTER. But well sheltered from the winds, no doubt.

MICHAEL. And open to the sun and light summer breezes.

MASTER. I think that seems right. And as for food?

MICHAEL. Excellent stocks of onion soup, coffee, brandy, meat sometimes, and a cupboard-full of little luxuries, good cider and tobacco and — oh, lots of things. And of course there would be a big comfortable bed, with linen sheets and soft pillows and a warm eiderdown. And I think it might run to two easy chairs, don't you?

MASTER. Perhaps it might. And is there nothing else you would ask for?

MICHAEL. To be free of rheumatism. To have my eyes

SATURDAY NIGHT AT THE HALFWAY HOUSE

young and keen again. To forget all the dreadful names Angélique called me. And for Angélique, to forget all the shortcomings of her husband and to remember only his love.

MASTER. Right again, Michael. Anything else?

MICHAEL. Just one thing. That every day you should pay us a visit in our little house by the sea — even if it were only a short visit, because we know you are always busy.

MASTER. Thank you, Michael. (*To Soul.*) Shall we take his advice, Ronan, my son?

SOUL. You'd do all these things for me and Angélique?

MASTER. We'll see what can be managed.

SOUL. But we're so — unimportant. Nobody's ever taken notice of us before.

MASTER. In Paradise there is no importance or unimportance. Nothing but the distinction of being there — a distinction which may be anybody's.

SOUL. I don't know what to say.

MASTER. I told you once before this evening — nothing. (*Rising.*) Well, I think we'd best be off.

SOUL (*looking round for other lucky ones*). But is there no one else coming with us?

MASTER (*sadly*). No one. (*Brightening.*) But Satan doesn't always do as well as he has tonight.

SOUL. I'm glad, dear Master.

MASTER. Michael, will you alter that notice-board before I go — it got left once, you remember.

[*Michael rubs out "Tonight" and writes "Saturday 7th" in its place.*]

MICHAEL. You will have your little joke, Master.

MASTER. Would you prefer me without a sense of humor? Come, Ronan, my son, and stand by my side. My blessing on you, Michael. Till next Saturday.

MICHAEL. Till next Saturday, dear Master.

[*His hand in that of the Soul, the Master slowly raises his head towards Paradise. As he does so, the wind rises*]

SATURDAY NIGHT AT THE HALFWAY HOUSE

and the lights fade out. Above the wind is heard the sound of singing, at first in the distance but growing louder and louder. The wind dies away as the singing dominates the now black stage. The curtain descends.

NOTE. For singing I suggest a gramophone record of Handel's Hallelujah Chorus from the Messiah.

DON'T FEED THE ANIMALS

By

BOB WELLINGTON

Copyright, 1940, by Samuel French.

CAST

SCRIPPS, *the butler.*

JIMMIE WALTON.

BUTTONS.

TEACHER.

MARIE.

DOROTHY.

SADIE.

PEARL.

DIANE CARTER.

SCENE. Jimmie Walton's apartment. Doors are left and right. There is a davenport just below the door right and other comfortable masculine furniture.

AT RISE. Scripps, a gentleman's gentleman, is discovered at the telephone which is on a stand a little to the left of center upstage.

DON'T FEED THE ANIMALS

SCRIPPS. I've explained that a thousand times, Mazie. Well, if you don't *want* to believe me . . . What's that? But, Mazie! (*There is a sound from off right.*) Say, I've got to ring off now. What? Sure I want to talk to you, but somebody's coming. Oh, all right. (*He hangs up with a bang and comes down stage mopping his brow and muttering to himself.*) Dames!

[*Jimmie Walton enters. Jimmie is a good-looking young bucko with somewhat the glow of the grape about him. In fact, it might even be said that he is more than a little intoxicated.*]

JIMMIE. Hello, Scrippsie!

SCRIPPS (*very much the servant*). Good evening, sir.

You are home earlier than I had expected you'd be, sir.

JIMMIE. Everybody makes mistakes. I'm home earlier than *I* expected.

SCRIPPS (*tries to help him off with his coat*). Might I be so bold as to inquire if anything is wrong, sir?

JIMMIE (*whirls, taking the coat out of Scripps' hand*).

Wrong? Huh? Everything's wrong. Scripps, do you know what I am?

SCRIPPS (*tries for coat again*). No, sir.

JIMMIE (*escaping with coat*). I'm a reprobate. I'm a drunken bum. I'm Hitler, Mussolini and the Big Bad Wolf all rolled in one.

SCRIPPS. Yes, sir, I mean no, sir. Ah, that is, sir . . .

JIMMIE. Just a minute, just a minute. You ain't heard nothin' yet!

[*Same business with the coat. Scripps trying so hard to be helpful and Jimmie always turning just in time to prevent him from getting it.*]

DON'T FEED THE ANIMALS

SCRIPPS. No, sir.

JIMMIE. Compared to me, Bluebeard and Jessie James were a couple of archangels.

SCRIPPS. Well, really, sir . . .

JIMMIE. I'm a no good souse that looks like a prehistoric mammal and smells like a walking brewery.

[During this speech Scripps finally gets coat.]

SCRIPPS (*trying to be helpful*). Why, you smell all right to me, sir.

JIMMIE. You! Who the hell asked you what I smell like? I'm talking about Miss Carter; Diane Carter. Do you happen to know her?

SCRIPPS. Oh, yes, sir. Certainly, sir. And I think I begin to understand, sir.

JIMMIE (*his voice decries the hopelessness of it all*). What a gal! I took her to night clubs, Scripps; to Hoffman's, St. Michael's Roof, The Purple Swan. She loved them all.

SCRIPPS. Undoubtedly.

JIMMIE. We took in the openings of every show in town. She went for 'em in a manner that was super-colossal!

SCRIPPS. Of course.

JIMMIE. Then there was the little item of flowers. . . . Roses by the dozen, orchids by the quart. . . . She is very fond of flowers, Scripps.

SCRIPPS. All women are, sir.

JIMMIE. Not to mention dinners, luncheons, teas . . . (*Savagely.*) I even put up with a couple of tea rooms to please that dame!

SCRIPPS (*mildly*). Tea rooms — My, my, wasn't that going a little farther than is required, even of a gentleman, sir?

JIMMIE. Right! Boy, if I'd only known . . .

SCRIPPS. Known what, sir?

JIMMIE. About tonight.

SCRIPPS. Tonight, sir?

JIMMIE. About the way it would pan out. I thought I

DON'T FEED THE ANIMALS

was making some pretty good headway up until tonight, Scripps.

SCRIPPS. Naturally, sir.

JIMMIE. Well, to make a long story short, I rented a hack and took Miss Diane Carter for a drive. There's a moon tonight, Scripps, a full moon, if you happened to notice.

SCRIPPS. I did notice, sir. A *very* full moon, if I may say so, sir.

JIMMIE (*waxes romantic*). It was wonderful there in the moonlight. Everything was so quiet, so peaceful, so sublime . . . (*He pauses and makes a wry face.*) Then I popped the question.

SCRIPPS (*misunderstands and is obviously shocked*). You did what, sir?

JIMMIE. I popped . . . asked her to marry me, you fool! Can't you speak English?

SCRIPPS. Oh, I see, sir. And she . . . refused?

JIMMIE. Refused? She said she wouldn't marry me if I was the last man on earth!

SCRIPPS. The last man on earth. My, my — and what did you say to that, sir?

JIMMIE. Why — uh — ah — I can't recall that I said much of anything. She started giving me some of her reasons and by the time she stopped for breath I had taken her home and was up at Kelley's getting blotto.

SCRIPPS. That's too bad, sir.

JIMMIE. Isn't it? So she wouldn't marry me if I was the last man on earth, eh? I should have had something to say to that. A good snappy comeback would have been in order, don't you think, Scripps?

SCRIPPS. Yes, sir. Good snappy comebacks are always in order, sir.

JIMMIE. Y' know, 's funny, Scrippsie, old boy, women are always saying that they wouldn't marry some poor devil if he were the last man on earth. I wonder what they

DON'T FEED THE ANIMALS

would do if there was only one member of the male sex left in the world, Scripps.

SCRIPPS. I couldn't say, sir. I never know what they are going to do when there are nearly a billion of us.

JIMMIE. There's something in that, all right. Say, will you get me a cold towel? My head feels like the inside of a Mexican beer joint.

SCRIPPS. Yes, sir, immediately, sir.

[As Scripps exits all the lights go off.]

JIMMIE. Now, what the devil? I wish they'd quit fooling around with that power plant. That's the third time this week the lights have gone off. Just my luck, no matches. Scripps! Hey, Scripps! Now he's gone. Oh, well . . .

GIRL'S VOICE *(off stage)*. Extra! Read all about it. Man exterminated! Extra! Extra paper! Here you are, lady. Man exterminated, extra!

JIMMIE. What's that? Scripps, see what that extra's about, will you? *(Yells.)* Hey, Scripps!

[The lights go on as a girl enters. She is very pretty and is garbed in something very much like a yachting costume. In the darkness a wall of bars has been dropped from the flies or carried in from the wings. It extends entirely across the stage about six feet back from the proscenium and transforms the room into a cage. Two signs hang conspicuously on the bars. They are respectively inscribed, MAN (Homo Sapiens), and DO NOT FEED.]

GIRL. Did you call?

JIMMIE *(quite sober)*. Huh? Say, where the devil did you come from?

GIRL. Why, didn't I hear you calling for me?

JIMMIE. You may have heard me calling for Scripps.

GIRL. I am Scripps, sir.

JIMMIE. What? You Scripps! Say, don't give me that.

GIRL. Well, that's what they told me to answer to if you called. My name's really Buttons.

JIMMIE. Buttons, that's almost as bad as Scripps. Who

DON'T FEED THE ANIMALS

told you to answer when I called for Scripps, Buttons?
BUTTONS. Why, the committee. They said you'd be coming out of your coma about now and would probably be calling for something.

JIMMIE. Coma? Committee? Say, pardon me if I'm a little muddled. Just what committee are you talking about?

BUTTONS. Why, the committee in charge of the zoo.

JIMMIE. Zoo? (*He notices bars for the first time.*) Say, what the heck is that?

BUTTONS. Bars, you mustn't mind them, there are always bars in the zoo, you know.

JIMMIE. Zoo? Are you trying to tell me that I'm at the zoo?

BUTTONS. Rather *in* the zoo, I think. You see, being the only man in the world, you are something of a curiosity.

JIMMIE. The only . . . Say, what is this, a game?

BUTTONS. Oh, didn't you know? That's right, I suppose you wouldn't. Yes, you are the only man left living in the entire world.

JIMMIE. You don't say? And when did all this happen?

BUTTONS. Oh, a very long time ago. They had you preserved in alcohol until a few days ago when it was decided to bring you out and place you on exhibition.

JIMMIE. Jeeze, preserved in alcohol and not even a hang-over. That must be good stuff they use.

BUTTONS. Oh, very good stuff, I'm sure.

JIMMIE. By the way, if I'm not too curious, just what happened to the rest of the boys?

BUTTONS. Oh, they were disposed of as painlessly as possible.

JIMMIE. Would you mind telling me how all this came about?

BUTTONS. Not at all. It seems that Dr. Millenberg perfected the elixir of youth. When it was discovered that no one grew any older and nobody died, the World

DON'T FEED THE ANIMALS

Court handed down a decision that men were unnecessary and pests in the bargain.

JIMMIE. That sealed our fate, eh?

BUTTONS. I'll say it did. It was an inspiration to note the enthusiasm with which patriotic women, the world over, rallied to the cause of wiping every trace of mankind from the earth.

JIMMIE. No doubt. . . . And how did I manage to escape the fate of my brothers?

BUTTONS. Well, the story has it that you wandered into a department store during a sale, and by the time anyone paid any attention to you, the world had forgotten what a man looked like.

JIMMIE. That's easily understandable.

BUTTONS. So it was decided to keep you around as a sort of curiosity.

JIMMIE. I suppose that means they'll keep me in the zoo, here?

BUTTONS. Well, that depends on the outcome of the next election.

JIMMIE. Election?

BUTTONS. It's the big political issue. The Democrats want to keep you as a matter of history and the Republicans want you exterminated.

JIMMIE. Gee, and I've been a Republican all my life.

BUTTONS. In the meantime they'll keep you here on display and rent you out occasionally.

JIMMIE. Rent me out?

BUTTONS. Yes, there are a number of persons coming this afternoon to look you over.

JIMMIE. Any special ones you know of?

BUTTONS. Well, the Ringling Sisters have made us an offer and I believe some lecturer wants you for a horrible example.

JIMMIE. Gee, what a lovely prospect!

BUTTONS. Aren't you thrilled? — Oh, that sounds like someone now. Excuse me while I get my paraphernalia.

DON'T FEED THE ANIMALS

JIMMIE. Paraphernalia?

BUTTONS. Just my whip and revolver. It makes it so much more impressive.

[*Exit.*]

JIMMIE. I dare say. (*Looks around.*) Same old room, same old furniture, if it wasn't for those bars, I'd think that dame was kidding me.

[*He goes to table upper center, gets a cigarette and lights it. Teacher and two students, Marie and Dorothy, enter in front of the bars.*]

TEACHER. There you are, children. Now be careful. Keep well back from the bars.

MARIE. Oh, look, Dorothy! Isn't he the funniest thing?

DOROTHY. I think he's cute. Can we pet him, Teacher?

TEACHER. Heavens, no! You children can't have any idea of the terrible things that used to result from trying to pet the horrid creatures.

MARIE. I knew a lady once who had a skunk for a pet. Did women used to keep these things for pets, Miss Skinner?

TEACHER. Certainly not! At least no self-respecting woman did, I can tell you.

DOROTHY. I wish they'd feed him. I love to see the animals eat.

MARIE. Oh, so do I. But it's more fun with the monkeys. They eat just like human beings — pretty near.

DOROTHY (*defensively*). Aw, I'll bet he could eat like a human being if he tried.

MARIE. He could not! Could he, Miss Skinner?

TEACHER. Well, I really can't say. There are two schools of thought on the subject. The first contends that a man, if properly watched over by a woman, could be taught to behave in an almost civilized manner.

MARIE. Oh, that's all tommyrot!

DOROTHY. He has an awfully intelligent face.

TEACHER. Careful, my dear! Countless women have had reason to regret ever taking a man at his face value.

DON'T FEED THE ANIMALS

MARIE. Oh, this is no fun, anyway. Let's go back and see the monkeys.

TEACHER. Why, you ungrateful girl, we have monkeys in the zoo at home. What do you think I brought you all the way down here for?

MARIE. I still think the monkeys are better.

DOROTHY. Oh, I don't. I think he's nice.

MARIE. Nice? That! Oh, shame on you-o! Shame on you-oo!

TEACHER. Young woman, I am surprised. I suppose you realize that your remark constitutes a direct effrontery to all womankind. I shall feel it my duty to report your conduct to the dean.

MARIE. Oh, Miss Skinner, she only . . .

TEACHER. Quiet! Now if you will each pay closest attention, I will deliver some notes I have prepared on the history of the evils of man.

[She fishes in her brief-case for notes.]

MARIE (*moves up to Dorothy and whispers*). You know, I'm beginning to like him too.

DOROTHY. Do you see anything of the keeper? I'm going to throw him a peanut, just for fun.

MARIE. I dare you!

[Dorothy makes sure the teacher is not watching and throws the harassed Jimmie a nut. He evidently takes it for a friendly gesture, for he smiles and comes up to the bars.]

JIMMIE. Pardon me, ladies, but could I interest you in voting the Democratic ticket?

TEACHER (*drawing herself up*). Why! Why! Isn't that just like a man? We haven't been here five minutes and already he's trying to make advances. Masher!!

DOROTHY. Why, I never had any idea he could talk! (*Goes to bars.*) You know, I like you.

JIMMIE. You don't look so bad to me either.

TEACHER (*grabs Dorothy by the ear*). Girls! Come away at once! I might have known something like this

DON'T FEED THE ANIMALS

would happen. Oh, why did I ever leave Cincinnati?

[She drags them off right. The girls all wave to Jimmie as they exit. Buttons enters with blacksnake and gun.]

BUTTONS. Oh, dear, they've gone, and I so wanted to show them how brave I was coming into your cage.

JIMMIE. What am I supposed to do, try and bite you?

BUTTONS. If you do, I shall be forced to use my whip.

JIMMIE. Well, you needn't worry. I don't recall that I was ever very much on biting little girls.

BUTTONS. I — I'm glad.

JIMMIE. Wouldn't care to be bit, eh?

BUTTONS. Oh, I'm not afraid of that but I should hate to use the whip on you.

JIMMIE. You would?

BUTTONS. Uh-huh. I don't mind so much with the lions and tigers, when they're unruly, but you — you're different.

JIMMIE. Do you mean to say that you go into the cages with the lions and tigers?

BUTTONS. Oh, sure, all the girls go into the cages with them, but so far, I'm the only one who wanted to take a chance on going into this one.

JIMMIE. You don't say. Am I as bad as all that?

BUTTONS. The others seem to think so.

JIMMIE. But *you* don't think I'm so bad, do you?

BUTTONS. No, I don't think you're so bad. I think you're wonderful! Oh! What have I said? And after all the warnings the committee gave me! Oh, my! Oh, dear!

[She runs off left in great alarm. Sadie and Pearl, a couple of lady bums, enter right. They wear flashing bowery costumes.]

SADIE. There! Wha'd I tell ya', Pal?

PEARL. Jeeze! It's d' real McCoy, all right.

SADIE. I'm telling ya', Poil, if we had dat we could do t'ings.

DON'T FEED THE ANIMALS

PEARL. Ain't woit (worth) much except t' look at, is 'e?

SADIE. Woit much? Say, I know a Jane dat 'ud pay big for dat bozo.

PEARL. Do ya', who's dat?

SADIE. Old lady Gillette. Her old man made a wad out of razor blades in de old days. She wants to get de critters started again.

PEARL. JEEEEEZE! Dat's treason!

SADIE. What d' hell d' we care? If we can get hold of dis bird, Gillette'll pay plenty. If we git the dough dat ain't treason as far as I'm concerned.

PEARL. Sadie, youse is got a head on ya'.

SADIE. You're tellin' me? D' main t'ing 'do is how are we gonna snatch dis guy?

PEARL. Dat's simple enough. We just knock off d' keeper an' help our self.

SADIE. I don't like d' idea a' rough stuff.

PEARL. Jus' leave dat tu me. Rough stuff is my middle name.

SADIE. Den I can leave dat part of it up to you, eh?

PEARL. Sure, you foinish d' brains an' I'll foinish d' strong arm.

SADIE. Swell! But in d' meantime we might as well scram. We can't accomplis' nothin' 'till after dark.

PEARL. Dat's a fact. Come on, let's get outa here.

SADIE. Oke.

[They exit left.]

JIMMIE. Buttons! Hey, Buttons! Scripps!

[He runs off right. The voice of Diane Carter is heard off right.]

DIANE. Is this where the man is?

DOROTHY (*entering right*). It's right in here. I was here with my teacher but she took us away.

DIANE (*enters*). She did, why?

DOROTHY. She said he was getting familiar.

DIANE. That sounds possible. Men, as I remember, often did that.

DON'T FEED THE ANIMALS

DOROTHY. Did they? Oh, that must have been fun!

DIANE (*with a sigh*). It was, sort of.

DOROTHY. I'll bet. That's why I ran off and came back. Maybe he *was* familiar, but I liked it. (*Jimmie enters left, mopping his brow with handkerchief.*) Oh, there he is. (*Runs up to bars.*) Hello, I've come back.

JIMMIE. Oh, hello there. Sorry I can't invite you in.

DIANE. Jimmie!

JIMMIE. Diane! How in the world did you get here?

DIANE. This little girl was kind enough to show me the way. Run along now, little girl; I have business with Mr. Walton.

DOROTHY. Mr. Walton your foot! I can read as well as you can; the sign says he's Homo Sapiens!

DIANE. Oh, you silly child. Jimmie, tell her you won't be detaining her any longer.

JIMMIE. And why should I tell her that?

DIANE. Why, so that we can be alone, sweetheart. Oh, Jimmie, I've missed you so!

JIMMIE. Oh, so you've changed your mind since I *am* the last man on earth?

DIANE. Oh, Jimmie! How foolish of you to have remembered my saying that. (*Laughs rather a mirthless laugh.*) Oh, you silly, silly boy!

DOROTHY. I don't think he's a bit silly. I'll bet you did say it and mean it too.

DIANE. Jimmie, I wish you'd do something to get rid of this person, so we could talk.

JIMMIE. I'm not so sure I want to get rid of her. She looks pretty good to me. She gave me a peanut a while ago.

DIANE. A peanut!

JIMMIE. Well, it showed the proper spirit, anyway.

DOROTHY. I have a lot more peanuts if you'd care for some, Mr. — er — Man.

JIMMIE (*goes up to her*). Thanks, I love peanuts.

DON'T FEED THE ANIMALS

[Buttons enters and stands severely in doorway right.]
BUTTONS. Do not feed the animals!

[Dorothy drops the bag of peanuts as if it were hot.]
JIMMIE (*excited*). Buttons, Buttons, I've just heard something — something that's awfully important to you. There's a plan on, a plot to — (*Stops and glances at others.*) I can't tell you in front of this mob. Can I see you out here for a minute?

[He drags her off left.]

DIANE (*watches them off, then turns to Dorothy*). Well, that gives you an idea where you stand.

DOROTHY. Don't it? I suppose he's still out here talking to you.

DIANE. Why — uh — the idea! I knew Jimmie before you were out of your incubator.

DOROTHY. Evidently he knows you, too.

DIANE. The ungrateful beast. I was all prepared to buy him and take him away from this place.

DOROTHY. You were?

DIANE. Yes, but I'm not going to now. The nerve of him, leaving me for that common zoo keeper. Now he'll have to stay in his filthy cage.

DOROTHY. Oh no, he won't. I've already wired for money enough to buy him myself.

DIANE. Why you — you young — How dare you even think of such a thing? I'm going to buy Jimmie, myself. I'll be back with the cash in half an hour.

[Starts off right.]

DOROTHY. I'll be back in less time than that.

[Exits left as Diane exits right. The teacher enters cautiously. She peers left and right, then takes a hack-saw out of her blouse and goes to work on one of the bars. As she works Marie peeks out from behind the davenport which is placed against the right wall, inside the bars. Buttons enters left, catches the teacher at work and blows a police whistle. Teacher darts off left. Marie crawls off hurriedly, unseen by Buttons.]

DON'T FEED THE ANIMALS

JIMMIE (*enters left, very much alarmed*). What's the matter, Buttons? Was that you on that whistle?

BUTTONS. Someone else trying to steal you, I guess. I just caught an old dame sawing on those bars.

JIMMIE. Ha! Ha! Looks like I'm rather in demand.

BUTTONS. Very much so.

JIMMIE. I guess you're the only one here that hasn't any use for me.

BUTTONS. Did I say that?

JIMMIE. Well, not exactly, but you sure made tracks out of this room.

BUTTONS. I'm sorry. You see, being an offspring of Dr. Kauffman's incubator, all I know about men is by hearsay, and I don't mind telling you most of it was pretty bad.

JIMMIE. I'll bet. Do I still appear such an ogre at closer inspection?

BUTTONS. I wish you did. Then it would be easier to keep my mind on my business.

JIMMIE. And what is your business?

BUTTONS. I'm your keeper. I'm supposed to crack a whip over you and make you sit up and bark and jump through hoops.

JIMMIE. As long as you're my keeper I'll bark to your music and jump through every hoop you point at.

BUTTONS. That's awfully decent of you, but I'll hate ordering you around just to entertain some crowd.

JIMMIE. Let's get out of here, Buttons. You've got a key to the place, haven't you? Let's make an escape.

BUTTONS. Oh, I couldn't. You see, we incubator girls are sort of slaves, most of us; that is, I can't ever leave this place.

JIMMIE. All the more reason, if they're keeping you here against your will.

BUTTONS. I'd like to, Jimmie, but . . .

JIMMIE. Oh, I suppose it is taking something of a chance, but it's no worse than staying here and waiting for those

DON'T FEED THE ANIMALS

cut-throats to knock you off. Come on, we'll find us a desert island where you can be the first lady Robinson Crusoe and I'll be your good man Friday.

BUTTONS. Gee, that sounds swell.

JIMMIE. We've got to, Kid, because — well — I love you, Buttons, an' that's all there is to it.

BUTTONS. Love . . . Love? I've never heard that word before, but it sounds like something grand! Oh, Jimmie! *(She throws herself into his arms. As she does so the lights go off.)* There, now we've done it! They warned me something like that would happen if we . . . Quick, this way!

[When the lights go up, the bars have disappeared and so has Buttons. Jimmie is sprawled on the davenport. Scripps enters.]

SCRIPPS. I'm sorry, sir, but with the lights off and all, I had the very devil of a time finding a towel.

JIMMIE *(jumps up and shakes the astonished Scripps by the hand)*. Scripps! Old boy! Old man! Thank God, you're a man!

SCRIPPS. A man, sir?

JIMMIE. YES, A MAN! Boy, am I glad to see — *(Stops suddenly and wonders.)* Oh, er — thanks for the towel, Scripps. That's all, I believe.

SCRIPPS *(puzzled, as who wouldn't be)*. Yes, sir.
[Starts to go.]

JIMMIE. Oh, I say, Scripps . . .

SCRIPPS. Yes, sir?

JIMMIE. Do we know any Buttons, Scripps?

SCRIPPS *(now he's sure somebody's crazy)*. Buttons?

JIMMIE. Yes, Buttons. Cute little devil with gobs of nice brown hair.

SCRIPPS. Buttons with nice brown hair, sir?

JIMMIE *(impatiently)*. Buttons is a girl's name, Scripps.

SCRIPPS. Oh, I see, sir. No, I don't know any Buttons, sir.

JIMMIE. Well, don't stand there like an idiot. Find her!

DON'T FEED THE ANIMALS

SCRIPPS. Find who, sir?

JIMMIE. Buttons. How many times do I have to tell you — Buttons?

SCRIPPS. Yes, sir. And where would you suggest I look, sir?

JIMMIE (*scratches his head*). Well, you might try the zoo.

SCRIPPS. The zoo, sir?

JIMMIE. Yes, the zoo. And if you don't find her there, comb the town.

SCRIPPS. Yes, sir. (*Door bell right.*) I beg your pardon, sir. I believe there's someone at the door.

[*As Scripps exits Jimmie goes down to where the bars were, looks up and down and scratches his head.*]

JIMMIE. Well, I'll be damned!

SCRIPPS (*enter right*). A lady to see you, sir.

JIMMIE. A lady at this time of night? Who is she?

SCRIPPS. She says she's Miss Diane Carter's sister, sir.

JIMMIE. That's right, Diane has got a sister. Well, show her in.

SCRIPPS (*exits. There is a pause, then he is heard off stage*). This way, Miss.

BUTTONS (*enters*). I suppose you'll think I'm either awfully stupid or awfully nervy coming here like this, but I just learned what my sister did to you.

JIMMIE. Buttons!

BUTTONS (*a little surprised herself*). How did you know my nickname?

JIMMIE. Why — uh — ah — I guess I just knew it, that's all. Won't you sit down?

BUTTONS. I never thought you even noticed me. I used to see you once in a while when you were calling on Diane, but I always had a feeling that you scarcely even saw little me.

JIMMIE. You don't give my highly reputed taste much credit.

BUTTONS. Well, after all, the big sister's boy friend hasn't usually much time for the girl's kid sister.

DON'T FEED THE ANIMALS

JIMMIE. That may be the rule, but it seems that you should always be the exception to prove it.

BUTTONS. Gee, you talk fast, Mister. I wish I could believe about half of what you're saying.

JIMMIE. I wish I could believe you were here at all. I still think my eyes are playing tricks on me.

BUTTONS. I suppose it was a bit rash. But, you see, I happen to know how my sister works. I heard how you came off tonight, and I couldn't help coming over to tell you that I think you got a raw deal.

JIMMIE. Well, after the raw deal comes the new deal. You couldn't give a fellow a helping hand, could you, Lady?

BUTTONS. Meaning?

JIMMIE. You and me. One thing I owe your sister, I sure know the places to go in this man's town. Think we could make a few of 'em together?

BUTTONS. We could try.

JIMMIE. Swell! What do you say to The Colony Club or Park Lane for a starter?

BUTTONS. Well, that's awfully nice of you, Jimmie — but — I'm not like my sister.

JIMMIE. Don't think I'm kicking, but what's the idea of that remark?

BUTTONS. It's foolish to go to those expensive places when there are so many things to do that don't cost any money.

JIMMIE. Gee, that's news to me. What places did you have in mind?

BUTTONS. Well, just as a suggestion, — we might spend tomorrow at the zoo.

JIMMIE. Say, let me get that straight. You said *at* the zoo, didn't you? *AT* the zoo?

[She does not quite understand, but after a moment she smiles and holds out her hands. He takes them, also smiling, as

The Curtain Falls

MAL TRELOARE
By
JANE DRANSFIELD

Copyright, 1937, by Jane Dransfield
Copyright, 1940, by Samuel French.

CAST

MAL TRELOARE.

AUNT BLANCH, *her aunt.*

SAUNDRY KEMP, *a miner.*

KAPPAN, *an old miner.*

The scene is laid in a cottage in the mining region of Cornwall, England, about the year 1800. Dusk.

NOTE. In the early 19th century there appeared in Cornwall, England, a peculiar kind of short literary composition, later to be called the Cornish Dialogues. Written in rhymed pentameter verse and in dramatic form, though without dramatic sequence, these Dialogues portray in a comedy vein of realistic detail the lives of the workers in the tin and copper mines, embodying the speech of the people, which at that period was a curious and variously spelled intermingling of the official English with the original and native Breton.

This play is based on the dialogue entitled "*Dialogue Between Mal Treloare and Saundry Kemp*" as quoted from an anonymous author in the Robert Hunt collection *Popular Romances of the West of England*. It is to be acted in the broad Elizabethan manner, with colorful and brisk spirit.

MAL TRELOARE

The room is neat and pleasant. The outer door in the rear center stands open, showing the last light of sunset over a lonely moor. In the wide fireplace, right center, a wood fire burns cheerfully beneath a steaming kettle hanging on the crane. Firetongs stand near, and on the mantel shelf are two candles, a dish of straw "lighters," and a long-handled soup ladle. At right angle left rear to the fireplace stands a high-backed wooden settle, and at right front a straight-backed chair. Right of the outer door is a low bench with wash basin, towel, and a bucket of water. Over this bench is a small mirror, and near it are two wall pegs, on one of which hangs a gaily embroidered apron. A high dresser with rows of dishes, mugs, and shining copper utensils stands against the wall left of the door rear. A lattice window curtained with bright chintz is left rear, and left front a door leading into an inner room. Between the window and the door is a keg of ale with a spigot. A straight-backed chair stands right front. A long narrow table with benches front and rear stands obliquely center left between the dresser and the inner door. This table is set for supper for two, with soup bowls, mugs, cheese, and bread.

When the curtain rises the room glows with the sunset light falling through the door and window. Aunt Blanch, a buxom woman of middle age, is carrying a plate of small cakes from the dresser to the table. She wears a dress of dark wool with long skirt and blouse with short full sleeves, an apron of lighter material gathered full at the waistband, a white kerchief crossing over the shoulders, a white starched cap, and low stout shoes. Placing the cakes upon the table, she goes to the door and looks out, evidently expecting someone. The wind rises, blowing her apron

MAL TRELOARE

about, and returning into the room she closes the door, and crossing to the fireplace takes the ladle and stirs the soup in the kettle. There is a knock on the door.

AUNT BLANCH

Wha's there?

(She continues to stir. The knock is repeated.)

Cum in! cum in! whoever ye are.

(Enter Saundry Kemp, a healthy, honest young fellow, tall and strong. He carries a miner's shovel over his shoulder, and wears an old jacket which is wet and spattered with mud. His battered hat has a hole in the side through which sticks a tuft of his flaming red hair. He is in a glum, determined mood.)

'Teez Saundry Kemp! I saw ye naw so near
When I looked now for Mal. What cheer, ma lad?

[She closes the door.]

SAUNDRY *(attempts to be polite).*

What cheer, Aunt Blanch?

AUNT BLANCH

The best that can be had.

When times be hard and mickle days be dull,
He's lucky who can get his stomach full.

[She takes a candle from the mantel, lights it with a straw "lighter," and sets it on the table.]

SAUNDRY

(Placing his shovel against the wall behind the settle.)
'Teez kendle teening! Where ez Mal Treloare?

AUNT BLANCH

Mal's trudging hum from Bal. The copper ore
She has been breaking.

SAUNDRY

So ye think.

I ha' ma doubts.

MAL TRELOARE

AUNT BLANCH

I cud na sleep a wink
Wi' doubts in head. When I wud cure a doubt,
The best way, to ma mind, ez speak it out.

SAUNDRY

Mal's late! She should be hum.

[He throws his hat down on the settle, and seats himself beside it, disconsolately running his hands through his hair until it stands a flaming fringe about his face. Aunt Blanch looks at him with amusement, and about to light a second candle desists, replacing it on the shelf.]

AUNT BLANCH

One wax wull do.

That flame of yours, ma Saundry, makes up two
To light the gloom. 'Teez knowing how to save
The pence that makes us women ride the wave.
Yes, you are right. Our Mally's late.

SAUNDRY (*not intending Aunt Blanch to hear*).
I warrant Crull ez wi' her, lubber pate!

AUNT BLANCH

Wha's that thee's saying, lad?

SAUNDRY (*aloud*).

'Teez cold this night.

AUNT BLANCH

An' so it ez. Most like the frost wull bite.

(Goes to Saundry, feels his jacket.)

Take off this jacket, do! 'Teez wet as shag.
'Twull dry beside the fire. Gemme the rag.

SAUNDRY

Naw, naw! Let be! 'Teez only in the bog
Above Ding Dong * I slipped on rotten log.

* The name of a famous tin mine in old Cornwall.

MAL TRELOARE

AUNT BLANCH

So ye work nights now in the Ding Dong mine?
Well, well, I hear the tin runs rich and fine.

SAUNDRY

By St. Chiwidden, be tin rich or pewer,
It cares not I. I'll lose ma wage this hour
An' wait for Mal.

[He goes to the window, where he stands looking out.]

AUNT BLANCH

The lad who wull speak so,
Now tell me, lad, wull ye wed Mal, or no?
(Saundry is silent. She sets an extra place at the table.)
My sister when she died left Mal to me
To bring her up as my own cheeld to be.
An' sence I thus had cheeld there wor no need
To get myself a man to warm an' feed.
To live wi'out a man for forty year
Ez proof I cud so live for forty more,
But that's no reason Mal shouldst live unwed.
Saundry, cum now. Speak up. Turn round your head
An' say.

(Saundry returns from the window to the fireplace.)

Well, well! I've set a plate for you.

(A noise at the outer door.)

Here's Mal!

(She runs to open the door. Kappan stands outside, scraping mud off his boots.)

Why, no! 'Teez Kappan. How dost do?

[Kappan limps in, leaning upon a cane of twisted hickory, and carrying a package. He is old and bent from labor, but his eyes have a merry twinkle. He wears an old loose woollen jacket, a round low crowned hat, and boots drawn up over rather tight trousers.]

KAPPAN *(cheerily)*.

How arry, Aunty?

MAL TRELOARE

[Stands his cane by the door, removes his hat, and lays it with his package on the table.]

AUNT BLANCH

(Reprovingly picks up the hat and package and places them on the chair left front.)

Have reverence to the food.

KAPPAN *(rubs his stomach, laughs)*.

Aye! that I will so that the grub be gud.

(Smells the soup in the pot in pleasant anticipation. Turns toward Saundry.)

Aha! 'teez Saundry Kemp. How arry, lad?

SAUNDREY

How arry, Kappan?

[Sits again on the settle, his head in his hands.]

AUNT BLANCH

(Draws Kappan aside, winking toward Saundry.)

He's very, very bad.

KAPPAN *(nods understandingly)*.

Oho! so, so! 'Teez a bad case of Crull.

[They whisper and laugh together.]

AUNT BLANCH

I see your wits, ma Kappan, be not dull.

(Taking his hat and package from the chair, Kappan sits and opens the package.)

I'll set another plate. One, two, three, four!

We'll eat as soon as Mal cums through the door.

There's food enough for all, both hot and cold,

Wi' soup an' cakes, though cakes be seven days old.

KAPPAN

Stale cakes be better than no cakes at all.

AUNT BLANCH

Teach that to Mal.

MAL TRELOARE

(Looks out the window.)

I glimpse her yellow shawl.

(Saundry starts up.)

But no! 'Teez only just a patch o' light

The sun ez leaving as he says good-night.

(Saundry sinks down again, and Aunt Blanch returns to her task.)

But she'll cum soon. Mally is fine an' strong

As I at seventeen. 'Twull not be long

To wait, for she'll cum fast across the field.

KAPPAN

(Holds up a pair of child's shoes which he has unwrapped from the package.)

I bawft a pair of shods for Sarah's cheeld.

AUNT BLANCH

Where bawft ye such gud shoes?

KAPPAN

Golsenny Fair.

AUNT BLANCH

Golsenny!

(Glances at Saundry, then whispers.)

Mal met mad Crull there.

SAUNDY *(rouses up)*.

I hear ye whisper. Ye can naw fool me!

Ye prate how Crull made grief 'tween I an' she,

An' marries Mal. Oh, I naw what ye say!

[Sinks down again in an unhappy state. Aunt Blanch nods at Kappan as though saying "So there!" and Kappan nods back. At that moment the door is flung open and Mal Treloare enters. She is a lithe, handsome girl of seventeen, fully matured, with dark hair and flashing eyes. She wears a yellow shawl and a hat shaped like a sunbonnet. She carries a sledge, such as was used at that period by the

MAL TRELOARE

women in breaking up the copper ore at the mines. She places the sledge beside the door, and advances briskly.

MAL

How arry, Aunty?

(She kisses Aunt Blanch.)

Kappan, how's the day?

KAPPAN

I ha' seen better, an' I ha' seen worse.

I take what cums.

[Drawing his chair near the fire, takes off his boots, warming his feet before the blaze. Mal turns toward Saundry, who has not looked up to greet her.]

MAL

'Teez Saundry Kemp, of course.

Weel, Saundry lad, what cheer?

[Saundry makes no reply. Shrugging her shoulders indifferently, Mal throws off her shawl, hanging it on the peg by the mirror, also her hat. Her dress and apron are similar in cut to Aunt Blanch's, but shorter and of bright colors. She washes her hands at the bench, and tidies her hair before the mirror.]

AUNT BLANCH

(Ladles up the soup into bowls, one by one.)

What made thee late?

Thee has no right to make the supper wait.

Ded drop in somewhere for a dram o' gin?

MAL

Now, Aunty, doant skoal poor I. I'm in

At kendle teening. Eez no that enough?

To be chid so at night, I say, ez tough

When Mal has worked all day in breaking ore.

AUNT BLANCH

Man Kappan, wull ye please shet outer door?

MAL TRELOARE

[Kappan, in stocking feet, closes the door, then returns to the fire. Mal removes her work apron, and puts on the gay embroidered one, which gives a festive touch to her appearance. All the while Mal has been prinking, Saundry has watched her furtively. Finally his jealousy overmasters.]

SAUNDRY

Who walked hum wi' you?

MAL (*advances, tossing her head teasingly*).

Oh! fine company.

AUNT BLANCH

(About to place a bowl of soup on the table.)

Doant tease the lad. Cum! ease his jealousy.

If ever ye ha' wish to win a man,

Then bolster his conceit as best ye can.

(Places the soup on the table, and goes to Saundry.)

Mal cum alone, as she cums every night.

MAL

Alone? Nay, Auntie Blanch, you be not right.

SAUNDRY (*rises, angry*).

Out wi' the troth, Mal. Who walked hum wi' ye?

MAL (*tosses her head and laughs*).

Who kept me company? Now, listen, do!

The wind across the moor, that blew an' blew,

The young moon in the west, a barking dog,

That sought to stir a rabbit from a log.

One star hooked on the sky, jest like to fall

From over-weight o' shining. An' that's all!

AUNT BLANCH

Stop clacking, Mal. Man Kappan, draw the ale.

(Saundry sits down again, baffled but not convinced.)

MAL TRELOARE

Aunt Blanch hands Kappan a jug, into which he draws ale from the keg, and fills the mugs. Mal, Aunt Blanch, and Kappan sit at the table, leaving a place beside Mal on the front bench for Saundry. Mal nibbles the cakes.)
Saundry, cum lad.

[Saundry, still glum, takes his place at the table.]

MAL

Aunty, these cakes be stale.

AUNT BLANCH

Cease eating, Mally. Kappan, please say grace.
To thank the Lord is ever goodman's place,
An' not a woman's, though us women do.
But I've a feeling God lists best to you
Who are the lords of earth.

[All bow their heads as Kappan says grace.]

KAPPAN

We thank Thee, Lord,
For heat, an' light, an' clothing, bed an' board.

[They begin supper, all except Saundry, who slouches down morosely.]

MAL

I'm glad ye make no long prayers, Kappie dear.
I'm starved to death an' cud' no wait to hear.
'Teez many a time I've stolen hearty bite
While every pious eye wor closed up tight.

AUNT BLANCH

Mally, for shame! The Lord will strike thee dead
For blasphemy, afore ye've chance to wed,
If so ye ha' a mind. Saundry, rouse up!
Here's plenty food, an' gud ale in the cup.

SAUNDREY (*rises*).

'Teez not the Lord, but Kemp, may strike Mal dead.

MAL TRELOARE

MAL (*laughs*)

What ails thee, Saundry? Hast thou lost thy head?

KAPPAN (*pushes Saundry's mug toward him*).

'Ere, take the cup o' ale. Et rights the blud.

AUNT BLANCH

Yea, take et, Saundry. Depend, ol do thee gud.

Mal means no harm. Stop laughing, Mal,

Or Aunt wull turn your face against the wall.

SAUNDRY

I'll take no ale. I ha' no wish to drink.

AUNT BLANCH

Thee's naw a man in that, now. What dost think?

SAUNDRY

I'll speak wi' Mal alone.

MAL

I'm no afraid.

[*Kappan rises.*]

AUNT BLANCH

Perhaps 'twere better, Kappan, ef we stayed.

KAPPAN

A man an' maid best have et out alone.

AUNT BLANCH

Well, Kappie, then we'll bide in other room.

(*Goes to the fireplace, stirring the fire so it burns up brightly, sending a warm glow throughout the room.*)

The fire wull do to patch a quarrel by.

The wax might be upset ef ye let fly.

(*Takes the candle, and with Kappan following, goes to the door left.*)

But harken, Saundry, ef ye do Mal harm,

'Teez Kap an' I wull make thy temples warm.

MAL TRELOARE

[*Goes out with Kappan. Mal eats on heartily. Saundry walks about.*]

SAUNDRY

How can ye eat?

MAL

Because I'm hungry, lad.
These cakes be stale, but they be not so bad.
[*Offers the cakes to Saundry.*]

SAUNDRY (*pounds the table*).

I'll eat no cakes, nor drink no ale wi' you!
Cum, tell me, Mal Treloare, what wull ye do?
Ha' ye no fear o' me?

MAL

Naw, no one bit.
So little use et ez to throw a fit.
Look to your face! 'Teez fiery as your head.
Most like the devil himself ez no more red.
I think thee's been ill-wished by Fraddam witch.

SAUNDRY

Ef witch ere crossed me, she wud get the switch.

MAL (*smiles coaxingly at Saundry*).

Cum, Kemp, sit down! There's somewhat ye should hear.
(*Saundry sits beside her.*)

Thee naws that day we wor to Bougheshere,
That day wi' cakes an' ale, at three o'clock,
Thees stuffed me so, I jest neen cracked ma dock.
You said to me, "Thee mayst depend thy life,
I love thee, Mal, an' thee should'st be ma wife."
An' to ma seemen, 'teez gud to lemme naw,
Whether the words were all in jest, or no.

SAUNDRY

Why, truly, Mal, I like a thing ded say,

MAL TRELOARE

That I wud have thee next Chiwidden day,
But zence that time, I like a thing ded hear,
Thees went wi' some one down . . . oh, I naw where!

MAL (*rises, angry*).

Od rot tha body, Saundry. Who said so?
Now, faath an' traath, I'll naw afore ye go.
Do lemme naw the Gossenbary dog!

SAUNDRY

Why, then, Crull said you wor down to Wheal Bog *
Wi' he.

MAL (*laughs derisively*).

Crull! Crull! So ye be afraid of he!
But Mal ez not. I ha' no fear in me.

SAUNDRY (*rises, threateningly*).

Ye laugh, do ye? Ye think that Kemp's afraid.
I'll show ye not to laugh, my Mallie maid.

[*He seizes her, and puts his hand over her mouth. She slips from him, and throws Kappan's boots at him. Dodging the boots he pursues her around the table, she pelting him with the cakes. He slips and falls with much hubbub. Enter at left Aunt Blanch followed by Kappan.*]

AUNT BLANCH

He's killing Mal!

MAL

(*About to pour the jug of ale over Saundry*).

Nay, Aunt! 'Teez Kemp that's kilt.

AUNT BLANCH (*takes the jug from Mal*).

No, Mal! I'll no ha' gud ale wasteful spilt.
Man Kappan, save the food! We'll let them be.
There's still enough to eat for you an' me.

(*Setting down the jug, she gathers up her apron, and*

* Wheal Bog signifies a mine or work.

MAL TRELOARE

sweeps into it from the table the remaining bread, cheese, and cakes.)

Who wastes gud food is sure to cum to want.

(Kappan takes a bowl of soup in each hand. Aunt Blanch, the apron gathered in one hand, takes the jug in the other, and goes to the door left, Kappan following. At the door she turns to see how Kappan is faring.)

Kappie, doant spill the soup adown your front.

[Stands aside to let Kappan precede her, then follows majestically with the rescued food. Mal closes the door. Meanwhile Saundry has risen, and much mollified, seated himself on the settle. Mal sits beside him.]

MAL

Now Mal has beat you, cum! out wi' it, pray.

In decent shape, what ha' ye got to say?

SAUNDRY

Crull said that you an' he ded make some tricks,
By dabben clay at youngsters making bricks;
An' that from there you went to Aafeway house,
An' drinkt some leeker. Yea, an' mickle worse!
For you to he like anything ded say
You'd wed wi' he, an' I mait go away.

MAL

I tell the lubber so? I to Wheal Bog?
I'll scat hees cheeks, the shameless, saucy dog.
Now hear me, Saundry Kemp, now down an' full,
Ef thee ha' patience, thee shust hear the whole.
Fust you must naw, 'teez true as thee art here,
Aunt Blanch an' I went to Golsenny Fair.
Who over tookt us in the doosty road,
In commen hum, but Crull, the cloppen toad.
Says he to Aunt, "What cheer? Aunt Blanch, what cheer?
Suppose the best, ef ye ha' been to Fair."
"Why, hiss," says Aunty, "been there a poor spur
I wedn't a gone, ef nawed et been so fur."

MAL TRELOARE

By this time, lock! we cum jest to the style,
Crull kept his eye upon me all the while.
"What cheer, braa maiden?" says he, "How dost do?"
Says I, "You saucy dog, what's that to you?
Keep off, young lad, else thees wull ha' a slap."
Then he put down some figs in Aunty's lap.
An' so I thoft, as he had been so kind,
He might go wi' Aunt Blanch, ef he's a mind.
An' so he ded, and tootk Aunt Blanch's arm.
"Areah," says he, "I ded naw mean a harm."
So then Aunt Blanch an' he ded talk an' jest
Bout dabbling clay an' bricks at Petran Feast.

SAUNDREY (*his spirits rising*).

Aha! then, Mal. 'Twas there they dabbed the clay.

MAL

Please Michael, Saundry, 'teez true wot I do say.
And hear me now, believe, Crull dedn't budge
From Aunty's arm till jest this side Long Brudge.
And then he says to Aunt, "Shall we go in
To Aafe-way house, and ha' a drop of gin?"
So Aunt ded say, "Such things she dedn't chuse,"
And squeezed ma hand to show me to refuse.
So when he wish't good-night, as ez the case,
He kissed Aunt Blanch, and jest neen touched ma face.
Now, Saundry Kemp, there's nothing shure in this,
To ma mind, then, that you shoust take amiss.

SAUNDREY (*shily slips his arm around Mal*).

No, faath, then, Mal, ef this be all and true,
I had a done the same, ef I was you.

MAL (*springs up*).

Next time in any house I see, or near am,
I'll down upon the plancheon, rat am, tear am!

SAUNDREY (*follows her*).

You mean you wud care give to Crull a blow?

MAL TRELOARE .

MAL

(Takes Kappan's cane, and lays about her, Saundry dodging the blows.)

I surely wud. Like this, an' this, an' so!

SAUNDRY

I true believe you, Mal. But sure enough
You need not lay about you now so rough.

(Returns the cane to its place.)

By gud St. Perran, who discovered tin,
And showed us miners how we shust begin
To mine the ore and make our daily bread,
You wud not, Mally, want to break ma head
Afore we two be joined as man an' wife.

MAL

I meant the blows for Crull, sure as your life.
Take off your coat, now, Saundry. Stay awhile!
For 'teez too late to walk the boggy mile
To Ding Dong mine.

SAUNDRY

I bawft a something new.

[Removes his jacket, revealing a new gay vest with bright buttons.]

MAL

Oh, lad, a pridy vest!

SAUNDRY *(swelling with pride)*.

Cost plenty, too.

MAL *(awed)*.

What ded it cost?

SAUNDRY

Cost two and twenty pence.

MAL

Wi' buttons an' all?

MAL TRELOARE

SAUNDRY

Aye!

MAL

Lemme ha' gud glance.

[Walks around Saundry, admiring the vest from every viewpoint.]

SAUNDRY

I bawft it, Mally, for our wedding day.
I wud na shewed it had I heard you say
You wor to marry Crull. And that is why
I wud na give Aunt Blanch ma coat to dry.

[As Mal comes around in front of him again, he seizes her hands, swings her around. Merrily the two slip into the steps of a romping country dance. Enter Kappan.]

KAPPAN

Black Beelzebub! Wha's this?

MAL (*dancing on, though slower*).

To drive away

A great owl, Kappan, that fell out of, yea,
The ivy bush upon the chimney top,
And came atumbling with his wings aflop
Down chimney stack, and sitting in the smoke
Cried out "hoo-hoo." Ye naw, an owl's no luck!

KAPPAN

An' so ye dance to send awa' the devil.

[Mal and Saundry stop dancing.]

MAL

Now, Kappie, man, the courant is no evil.

KAPPAN

Aye! 'teez the devil dancing in the wood
That keeps gud folk from doing what they should.

MAL TRELOARE

(Searches for his shoes, and finding them, sits and draws them on with great effort.)

Now you, man Saundry, arten thee ashamed
To stay so late? Thee wust be surely blamed
Ef thee stay here all night to prate wi' Mal,
When thee is due to work the mine at Bal.

SAUNDREY *(his arm around Mal)*.

Why, harkee, Kappan, and I'll tell thee straight.

KAPPAN

I gave gud care that I wor never late
When I worked mine at night. I'll ha' ye know.

MAL

Doant tell the owners, if he dusent go.

KAPPAN

Perhaps thee thinks the drolls wull do hees work,
Or fairies do the tasks that he wud shirk.

SAUNDREY

Mally an' I been courting half a year.
Hold up thy head, Mal. Doant be ashamed, dost hear?
And Crull one day made grief 'tween I an' she.

KAPPAN

I ken the tale. Waste no time telling me.

MAL

Crull told him lies as round as any cup.

SAUNDREY

But now that Mal an' I this night ha' made it up,
I'll naw go work this hour in boggy mine.
I'll stay wi' Mal till village clock strikes nine.

KAPPAN

For man to shirk hees work for eye of lass,
I wud na answer what may cum to pass.

MAL TRELOARE

[Puts on his hat, takes his cane, and goes out rear.]

SAUNDRY

Cum, Mal Treloare, now you must think of this,
Sence we're to wed, we sure must ha' a kiss.

MAL (*holding off*).

Then wipe your mouth, lad, from the mundic stuff.
I'll have my kisses clean, though they be rough.

[Saundry wipes his mouth with the back of his hand, and Mal hers likewise. They are about to kiss, but are stopped by a loud knock on the outer door. They spring apart. Aunt Blanch rushes in, left, goes to the door, and slips the bolt into place. The knock is repeated.]

AUNT BLANCH

Wha's there? Who knocks so loud this hour of night
When it ez surely time to douse the light?

VOICE OUTSIDE (*gruffly*).

'Teez Crull, Aunt Blanch.

SAUNDRY (*savagely*).

Crull!

MAL (*frightened*).

Crull!

AUNT BLANCH

What want ye, Crull?

SAUNDRY

Open the door! For lies that Crull can tell
I'll break hees head.

MAL

Doant open, Aunty, no!

SAUNDRY

Ded ye not say ye wud give Crull a blow?

MAL TRELOARE

MAL

I ded na mean that you an' Crull should fight.

SAUNDRY

Ye speak soft words for Crull? ye fear my might?

So 'twas no lies! You'd make a fool o' me!

Now Crull has cum, well, who is fool, we'll see.

[Takes up one of the table benches, brandishing it about.]

AUNT BLANCH

Crull, haste awa'! Mad Saundry Kemp ez here.

He'll murder you, ef he can cum so near.

SAUNDRY

Beenn't I best hurler in this whole Penzance?

Clear out afore me, now. Awa', Aunt Blanch!

If ye'll not slip that bolt . . . Mal, stand awa'!

I wull smash in the door, now, like 'twas straw.

MAL

Ye wull not, Saundry Kemp! Not Aunty's door!

[Mal seizes one leg of the bench at the opposite end from Saundry, Aunt Blanch the other, and the two pull against Saundry.]

SAUNDRY

Let go, ye women!

AUNT BLANCH

Hang on, Mal Treloare!

When God made Adam, He made also Eve.

Mal, doant let go!

MAL

Not I, Aunt Blanch, believe!

AUNT BLANCH

You red-haired Dane, let go!

MAL TRELOARE

SAUNDRY

Let go, both ye!

Call me no Dane. I cum of Cornwall tree.

[Pushing and tugging the three whirl about the room, finally falling all together in a jumbled heap. As they try to extricate themselves the knock is repeated. Saundry frees himself and dashes to the door.]

SAUNDRY

Aha! So Crull's still here. Now let him take Hees dues for all the trouble he can make.

[Slips back the bolt and opens the door. Kappan stands on the threshold, his cane in hand, a sly smile on his face. Mal and Aunt Blanch have risen. He enters.]

KAPPAN

Wha's this? I dedn't ken 'twould mean a fight
Ef Crull shust knock upon the door this night.

AUNT BLANCH *(in the doorway, peering out)*.
There's none about! There's no one here at all,
And not a hare nor hound to shew of Crull.

MAL *(taking Kappan's cane)*
I ken the game. Man Kappan's played a trick
And knocked upon the door wi' hickory stick.

KAPPAN

The shods for Sarah's cheeld, I ha' forgot.
[Wraps the shoes up again in the package.]

SAUNDRY

"'Teez Crull, Aunt Blanch." Ded you say that, or not?
[Kappan nods.]

AUNT BLANCH

Kappan, cum tell! why has thee made this fuss
And nearly brought the death of all of us?

MAL TRELOARE

KAPPAN (*smiles beamingly upon them all*).

I kenne 'twas time that Saundry went to Bal,
An' not stay here so long acourting Mal.
For ef he dusement work, he can naw wed,
For he wull ha' no pence to bawft the bed.

[*Saundry puts on his jacket and hat, and takes his shovel.*]

SAUNDRY

Good-night, man Kappan. Thee I wishee well,
Although thees played the trick of absent Crull.

(*Shakes hands with Kappan.*)

Aunt Blanch, good-night, although ye ded me shame
To cast a slur on my gud Cornwall name.

(*Shakes hands with Aunt Blanch.*)

Thee's tokened to me, Mally, for next May.

[*Kisses Mal heartily.*]

MAL

Unless thee listens to more lies folks say.

Curtain

-

LITTLE DARLING

By

PEGGY OLIVER

Copyright, 1940, by Samuel French.

CAST

JUNIPER, *a colored maid.*

ELEANOR BURTON, *daughter.*

MR. BURTON, *head of the family.*

JESSIE BURTON, *a little darling.*

LEW MANDERS, *a young football hero.*

VIOLA BURTON, *the eldest sister.*

THE TIME. Afternoon of an early Autumn day in the present year.

THE PLACE. The living room of the Burton home, located in a small American city. The room is pleasant and substantial, and furnished in quiet good taste. The main entrance is in the form of a large double door, or arch, which is placed midway in the back wall. This arch leads on the left to the front door of the house, and on the right to a stairway to the upper rooms; neither front door nor stairway, however, needs to be visible from the audience. Another door, up right, leads to the kitchen and dining room, and there is a row of windows midway of the left wall. An overstuffed divan is placed stage center, while there are two armchairs to match it in the corners down right and left, respectively. A writing desk and straight chair are placed near the back wall left of arch; on the desk is a telephone. There is a small round table right of arch, and an oblong davenport table against the right wall below the door. Flowers, books, vases, etc.

LITTLE DARLING

Juniper is discovered alone on the stage. She is humming a modern popular song while she dusts the furniture. After a moment, the telephone rings, and she crosses to desk to answer it.

JUNIPER (*at desk, picks up the telephone and speaks into it*). Hello. . . . Yassuh, dis is de Burton house. . . . Who? . . . Oh, Miss Eleanor? Yassuh, I believe she's heah — jes' hol' de wire. I'll call her. (*Puts the telephone down, steps into the arch and calls.*) Miss Eleanor! Miss Eleanor!

ELEANOR (*calls from offstage right*). Here, Juniper!

JUNIPER. You's wanted on de telephone, honey!

ELEANOR (*from offstage*). Okay! Be right down!

JUNIPER (*crosses to desk and picks up telephone again*).

Jes' a minute — she say she be right down.

[*Puts telephone down and resumes dusting the furniture.*]

ELEANOR (*after a moment, rushes in center from right*).

Who is it, Juniper?

JUNIPER. I didn't ask him, honey — some gen'l'mun.

ELEANOR. A gentleman? (*Dashes to desk and grabs up telephone.*) Hello. . . . This is Eleanor. . . . (*Her eyes open wide in pleasant surprise.*) Lew? Lew Manders? . . . Oh, I never expected — I mean — how are you? And when did you get in? . . . Today? I got in yesterday myself. . . . But I thought you were going to stay at Tech until after the Thanksgiving game. . . . Oh, you *did*? Goodness! Nothing serious, I hope? . . . Oh. . . . Well, it's too bad it'll keep you out of the game. . . . What? . . . All right. . . . In five minutes? Well, all right — I'll expect you. 'Bye! (*Hangs up.*) Gosh! I gotta rush!

LITTLE DARLING

JUNIPER (*with a broad smile*). Gettin' company, honey?

ELEANOR. Uh-huh, Mr. Manders.

JUNIPER. Dat football player? He's a nice boy.

ELEANOR. He hurt his ankle, so he came home for the holiday and — My! Here I am chattering, and he'll be here any minute. I've gotta run.

[*Dashes into arch and collides with Mr. Burton, who is just entering center from right with a traveling bag in his hand.*]

MR. BURTON. Here!

ELEANOR. Oh, Dad! Excuse me, but I've gotta run. Lew Manders is coming over and . . .

MR. BURTON (*smiles*). Fine! But can't you take a minute to say goodbye to me? I'm leaving.

ELEANOR. Oh, are you? (*Throws her arms around him and gives him a hug.*) Goodbye, Dad!

MR. BURTON. Goodbye, sweetheart. Be a good girl.

ELEANOR. Uh-huh. You'll just *have* to excuse me. I've got to change and . . . (*Rushes into arch.*) Have a nice trip, Dad!

[*Rushes off center to right.*]

MR. BURTON (*shouts after her*). Thanks! (*Comes back into room.*) Where's the rest of my family, Juniper?

JUNIPER. Miss Jessie — she's playin' outside. I don't know wheeah Miss Viola is.

MR. BURTON (*looks at his watch*). I'd liked to've seen them before I left. Well, you keep an eye on them for me, Juniper.

JUNIPER. Yassuh. You sho' you won't be back fo' Thanksgiving dinner, Mistuh Burton?

MR. BURTON. Wish I could. This confounded business of mine —

JUNIPER. Dat's sho' too bad. De turkey look like a specially tender one.

MR. BURTON. Stop! You're breaking my heart!

JESSIE (*skips in center from left*). Hey, Dad!

MR. BURTON. Hello, Jessie.

LITTLE DARLING

JESSIE. Hello. There's a taxi waitin' out front, Dad.

MR. BURTON. Yes, I ordered it. I'm leaving.

JESSIE. Gee, do you have to go, Dad? Why don't you stay here for Thanksgiving — with us? It'll be fun.

MR. BURTON. I wish I could, darling. But unfortunately, business calls.

JESSIE. Business always seems to call.

MR. BURTON. And that's the truth. Now, I want you to promise me you'll behave yourself, Jessie.

JESSIE. Sure. Don't I *always* behave myself?

MR. BURTON. Ahem! We won't go into that. Mind you, no fights with your sister Viola. Remember that she's the head of the family while I'm gone.

JESSIE. Why?

MR. BURTON. Because she's the eldest.

JESSIE. Well, she may be the eldest, but she's also the dopi-est . . .

MR. BURTON. Jessie! Is that any way to speak of your sister?

JESSIE. Sure, if you want the truth. Now in my opinion, Dad, I'd make a pretty good head of the family, myself. Viola may be a few years older, but she ain't got my brains.

MR. BURTON (*suppressing a smile*). Never mind! Just remember, I don't want to hear any bad reports about you when I get back.

JESSIE. I'll be an *angel*, Dad.

MR. BURTON. That's fine.

JESSIE. If Viola leaves me alone.

MR. BURTON. Well, you leave her alone, and I'm sure she'll . . .

[*The sound of an automobile horn is heard from off left.*]

JESSIE. There's the taxi, Dad.

MR. BURTON. Yes, I hear it. (*Looks at his watch.*) I'll have to step on it. Goodbye, darling!

[*Gathers Jessie in his arms and embraces her.*]

JESSIE. Goodbye, Dad!

LITTLE DARLING

JUNIPER. Have a nice trip, Mistuh Burton.

MR. BURTON. Thanks. Goodbye!

[*Picks up his bag and exits center to left.*]

JESSIE (*crosses to window and waves to him*). Goodbye!

There they go.

JUNIPER. I bet he hates to leave.

JESSIE (*sighs*). Poor Dad!

[*Crosses to divan.*]

JUNIPER. Yeah, too bad he has to miss all dat nice turkey.

JESSIE (*sprawls face down on divan*). Oh, I'm not thinking of *that*.

JUNIPER. Ain't you, honey?

JESSIE. I'm thinking of how little he knows about *life*.

JUNIPER. Huh?

JESSIE. He's awful nice, but sometimes I think he's not very smart, even if he *is* my father.

JUNIPER. What you talkin' about, chile?

JESSIE. I mean — the way he lets himself be taken in by my sister Viola.

JUNIPER. What you got against yo' sister Viola, honey? 'Pears to me she's a right smart young lady.

JESSIE (*scornfully*). That shows how much you know about it. I'll tell you what she is — she's a *menace*.

JUNIPER. Now, dat ain't no way to be talkin', chile.

JESSIE. Yes, it is a way to be talking. Just watching her go lording it around the house. . . . (*Makes a face.*) with her stuck-up airs — it gives me a *cramp*.

JUNIPER (*scandalized*). Now, hush yo' mouth, honey. I caint let you say such things.

JESSIE (*impervious to this rebuke*). She thinks she owns me, just because she's a year or two older.

JUNIPER. A year or two? Why, she's nineteen, chile, and you only *twelve*.

JESSIE. Well, why quibble about a couple o' years? And the way she treats poor Eleanor . . .

JUNIPER. What you mean, the way she treats her?

LITTLE DARLING

JESSIE. Making her wear her old dresses, stealing her beaux . . .

JUNIPER. Hush, chile!

JESSIE. It's true, ain't it? Just lookit the way she took Willie Strubb away from Eleanor. Though what any-one wants with Willie Strubb . . . (*Purses her mouth like a fish.*) Old fish-face! (*Juniper laughs despite herself.*) But she took him away, didn't she, just because Eleanor saw him first?

JUNIPER. I never mixes in nobody's private affairs, and you oughtn't too, neither.

JESSIE. Can't stand anyone having any fun 'cept herself. You know what this family needs, Juniper?

JUNIPER. What?

JESSIE. A *rebellion*, that's what. And if Viola don't watch out, it's gonna have one.

JUNIPER. I got an idea Mistuh Burton's gonna be sorry he went away.

JESSIE (*jumps down from divan*). I want an apple.

JUNIPER. An apple — what fo'?

JESSIE. Because I got some thinking to do, and I always can think better with an apple. Come on, Juniper, gimme an apple.

JUNIPER (*finishes dusting with a flourish, and crosses to door right*). All right. Come along, honey, I'll see can I find one fo' you.

[*They exeunt right.*]

JESSIE (*after a moment, re-enters right, chewing on an apple. With the apple stuffed in her mouth, she puffs herself up and strikes a Napoleonic pose. Then she relaxes, starts chewing again, and wanders about the room, her brows corrugated in thought. Strikes another pose and starts to orate*). "I know not what course the others may take, but as for me, give me liberty or give me death!" (*Starts chewing the apple again, nodding to herself.*) You said it! (*Sticks the apple in her*

LITTLE DARLING

mouth and tries to do a flip-flop, but lands in a sitting position on the floor.) A rebellion — that's just what this family needs. And I bet Patrick Henry would say exactly the same thing if he was here. *(Takes her oratorical pose again.)* "Give me liberty or give me . . ." *(The doorbell rings. Sticks the apple in her mouth and exits center to left. Re-enters almost immediately, followed by Lew.)* Come on in.

LEW *(limps into room)*. Thanks.

JESSIE *(looks him over curiously)*. Are you a new one?

LEW *(puzzled)*. A new one?

JESSIE. I mean — I guess you wanted to see my sister Viola, didn't you?

LEW. Oh, no. I'm calling for Eleanor.

JESSIE. Oh, Eleanor! *(Smiles cordially.)* Well, in that case, I guess you must be okay!

LEW *(smiles)*. I'm glad you think so. Mind if I sit down?

JESSIE. Oh, no, I don't mind.

LEW. Thanks.

(Limps across to divan and sits.)

JESSIE *(curiously)*. Been in a war, or something?

LEW. In a way — the football wars.

JESSIE *(impressed)*. Football? Are you a quarter-back or a half-back?

LEW. I'm a center.

JESSIE *(disdainfully)*. Oh, a center! Say, did you just meet Eleanor?

LEW. No, we're old friends. We went to high-school together.

JESSIE. Oh. She goes to Welton College now.

LEW. I know. And I go to State.

JESSIE. You know, Eleanor's really *awful* smart.

LEW. Is she?

JESSIE. She certainly is. And — and she knows how to cook, too — and she sews nearly all her own clothes. . . .

LEW. She does?

LITTLE DARLING

JESSIE (*nods*). And — don't you think she's got the most *marvelous* disposition?

LEW. Yes.

JESSIE. You know something?

LEW. What?

JESSIE. I bet she'd make someone an awful good wife!

LEW (*laughs*). Say, what is this?

JESSIE. Oh, nothing, but — you don't happen to know my sister Viola, do you?

LEW. Not very well. I used to see her around, a couple of years ago, before I went off to State. How is she these days?

JESSIE. Mean as ever!

LEW. Mean? Your sister?

JESSIE (*looks around, then whispers confidentially*). She ain't my sister!

LEW. Huh?

JESSIE. Not really. Somebody switched babies on our family, only we didn't find it out till it was too late. She really comes of a long line of thieves and criminals.

LEW (*laughing*). You have got it in for her, haven't you?

JESSIE. Oh, no, I'm only telling you the truth.

LEW. Well, how about calling Eleanor now?

JESSIE. Okey-doke. (*Crosses to arch and screams.*) Eleanor!

ELEANOR (*from offstage right*). What?

JESSIE. Someone here to see you!

ELEANOR (*from off right*). All right, Jessie! I'll be right down!

JESSIE (*comes back to him*). Say, listen, you know anything about rebellions?

LEW. Rebellions?

JESSIE. Don't you think there's times when it's the only thing to do?

LEW. Well . . .

JESSIE. Did you ever hear of Patrick Henry?

LEW. In a small way.

LITTLE DARLING

JESSIE. Well, lemme tell you something — he certainly had the right idea!

ELEANOR (*rushes in center from right*). Hello, Lew!

LEW (*rises*). Well, hi, Eleanor! I'm glad to see you!

ELEANOR. I'm glad to see you, too, Lew.

[*They stand looking at each other, a little embarrassed.*]

JESSIE (*beaming at them*). Okay — everybody's glad to see everybody else! (*They laugh.*) Well, I guess two's company. So long!

[*Exits center to left.*]

ELEANOR (*laughing*). She's a funny little thing, isn't she?

LEW. Yeah, she sure is. Excuse me, I think I better sit down.

[*Sits in divan.*]

ELEANOR. Oh, your ankle! Does it hurt very much?

LEW. Nope. It'll be all right in a week or two. Just my luck I had to miss the big game, though.

ELEANOR (*sits in chair right*). Yes, I know how you must feel. You've become quite famous, with your name in all the papers, and everything.

LEW (*modestly*). Oh, I didn't do anything much — just played a little football, that's all.

ELEANOR. Enough to make the all-Conference team, I noticed.

LEW (*smiling*). Been following me, Eleanor?

ELEANOR (*a little confused*). Well, I . . . (*They both laugh.*) But why didn't you stay at Tech to see the game? I should think you'd want to do that, even though you couldn't play.

LEW. I did, but there was something else I wanted to do more.

ELEANOR. What?

LEW (*trying to make it casual*). Oh, come home and see — some people.

ELEANOR. Oh.

LEW. Say, you're looking mighty well, Eleanor.

ELEANOR. Thanks. You're looking well yourself.

LITTLE DARLING

LEW. I guess Welton must agree with you. You've kind of — blossomed out, sort of, since the last time I saw you.

ELEANOR (*pleased*). Do you really think so?

LEW. I sure do. (*After a little pause.*) Were you aiming to do anything this afternoon?

ELEANOR. Oh, nothing special. I thought I might look up some of the girls later on.

LEW. Uh-huh. Look, I got a couple of tickets for the local high-school game this afternoon — coach gave them to me. Probably won't be very exciting, but I thought you might want to come if you weren't doing anything else.

ELEANOR. I'd be glad to.

LEW. Swell! And how about the Senior Prom tonight?

ELEANOR. How about it?

LEW. I suppose you've got a date?

ELEANOR (*shakes her head*). Huh-uh!

LEW. You haven't? Well, of course, I won't be able to dance with this bum ankle of mine, but if you'd like to come and sit out a few with me . . .

ELEANOR. I'd *love* to go with you, Lew.

LEW. Then that's settled. Better get ready for the game now.

ELEANOR (*rises*). All right. Is it cold out?

LEW. Pretty chilly.

ELEANOR. I'll have to get into some warmer clothes. Have I time?

LEW. Sure, it's early.

ELEANOR. I'll only be a few minutes.

[*Turns to leave.*]

LEW (*his hand on his ankle*). Darn it!

ELEANOR. Why, what's the matter?

LEW. This bandage on my ankle has got undone. Have you got a scissors, Eleanor?

ELEANOR. I think Juniper has one in the kitchen. Just a minute.

LITTLE DARLING

LEW (*rises*). I'll get it. You go on upstairs and change.

ELEANOR. All right. I won't be long.

[*Exits center to right as Lew exits right. The stage is empty for a moment, then Viola enters center from left. She looks into room, then exits center to right. There is another pause, then the telephone begins to ring.*]

JUNIPER (*enters right. Crosses to desk and picks up the telephone.*) Hello. . . . Yes. . . . Miss Viola? . . .

No, she ain't here right now. . . .

VIOLA (*calls from off right*). Yes, I am, Juniper!

JUNIPER (*in telephone*). Yes, she is! . . . She must 'a' jes' got in. Hold de wire, please. (*Puts telephone down. Viola enters center from right.*) I didn't know you was heah, Miss Viola. Yo' Daddy lef' fo' New Yawk — he said he was sorry he couldn't wait fo' you.

VIOLA. Thanks. (*Crosses to desk and picks up the telephone.*) Hello.

JUNIPER. Yo' welcome.

[*Exits right.*]

VIOLA (*in telephone*). Tom? . . . Yes. . . . What? (*Her face registers dismay.*) Oh, Tom! . . . Angry? Of course I'm angry — this is a fine time to break off a date for tonight, I must say. Well, I don't care if your sister *has* the measles. I don't care if your whole family has the measles — it's still a dirty trick. . . . What do you expect me to do — sit home by myself? . . . No, I couldn't get another date — not at this hour. . . . Can't you make it anyway, Tom, just for *my* sake? Can't you just take me to the dance and then leave? . . . You can't? . . . Well, if that's the way you feel about it, you needn't bother to call me again — ever! . . . You heard me. Goodbye!

[*Angrily slams the telephone down, and crosses to arch.*]

LEW (*enters right*). Oh — hello.

VIOLA (*starts*). Oh! (*Smiles.*) You gave me a scare, walking in that way.

LITTLE DARLING

LEW. I'm sorry. I guess you don't remember me — you're Viola, aren't you?

VIOLA. I am.

LEW. I'm Lew Manders. Remember?

VIOLA. Why, of *course*! (*Looks him over interestedly.*)
How stupid of me to have forgotten, Mr. Manders.

LEW. Oh, that's all right.

[*Limps over to divan.*]

VIOLA. Dear me, you're wounded!

LEW. It's nothing — a little accident I was in playing football — nothing much.

VIOLA. Let me help you.

[*Takes his arm and helps him to sit down.*]

LEW. Thanks.

[*Smiles at her a little self-consciously.*]

VIOLA. Don't mention it. (*Sits with him.*) Don't mention it, Mr. Manders. (*Sizes him up, decides he's worthwhile game.*) So you're the famous Mr. Manders?

LEW (*pleased*). Famous?

VIOLA (*coolly*). Oh, now don't pretend. I've heard all about you — practically *everybody* has heard about you. Why, I'll bet you're one of the most famous football players in the whole country.

LEW (*modestly*). Oh, I don't know . . .

VIOLA. Well, *I* know. And what are you doing here, Mr. Manders? Don't tell me you came just to see poor little me.

LEW. No, that is — not exactly. I'm waiting for Eleanor.

VIOLA. Oh, lucky Eleanor! And just like her to keep you waiting, isn't it?

LEW. Well . . .

VIOLA. She's a dear little thing, of course, but so *thoughtless*. But you mustn't mind Eleanor, Mr. Manders. I'm sure she *means* well.

LEW. Yes, I . . .

LITTLE DARLING

VIOLA. After all, she's just a baby. She'll be all right when she grows up.

LEW. When she grows up? She's eighteen, isn't she?

VIOLA (*smiles confidentially*). She's always fibbing about her age, because she doesn't want to be thought so young. As a matter of fact, she was just seventeen last month.

LEW. Oh, I see.

VIOLA. But, dear me, perhaps I shouldn't be giving away Eleanor's secrets.

LEW. No, that's all right.

VIOLA. Heavens, there isn't anything serious between you two?

LEW. Er — no, of course not. We're just — friends.

VIOLA. That's what I thought. Because, of course, she's far too *young* for anything else. But she is a dear little child, isn't she?

LEW. Yes, she is.

VIOLA. But we've talked enough about Eleanor. Tell me all about yourself now, Mr. Manders.

LEW (*shrugs*). Oh, well, nothing much to tell.

VIOLA (*smiles knowingly*). I'll bet you could tell plenty, if you only wanted to. What are you going to do when you get out of college?

LEW. Well, that won't be for a couple of years yet, but I sort of thought I might go in for law.

VIOLA. Law! Why, that's it exactly. I knew it the moment I set eyes on you. There's something so *compelling* about you, Mr. Manders. Why, I wouldn't be a bit surprised if you got to be governor or something one of these days.

LEW (*deprecatingly*). Oh, now . . .

VIOLA. And then I can say I knew you "when." Won't it be thrilling?

LEW (*laughs*). You're a great kiddier, Viola.

VIOLA. No, I'm not. I'm really quite good at sizing people up. And there's something about you, some-

LITTLE DARLING

thing *different*. (*Laughs.*) But I suppose lots of girls have told you that.

LEW. No, they haven't.

VIOLA. Then they're stupid. Because anyone could tell you're different from the ordinary run of people. Like Lincoln.

LEW. Lincoln?

VIOLA. Except of course you're better-looking. I suppose I'm just a silly girl, but do you know, Mr. Manders, I've always hoped that some day I'd meet someone like that — like Lincoln — because he's always been my ideal. (*Sighs.*) But I guess I'm not as lucky as *some* girls.

LEW (*falling*). You've got a lot of depth, haven't you?

VIOLA. Oh, you're just saying that to make me feel good.

LEW. No, I'm not — really.

VIOLA. It's *awfully* sweet of you. What are you and Eleanor doing?

LEW. Well, we sort of thought we'd take in the high-school game.

VIOLA. Oh, how nice! I bet it'll be *loads* of fun. (*Shoots him a glance.*) I *was* going, myself.

LEW. You were?

VIOLA. Yes, but I find my escort can't make it. His dear little sister has the measles.

LEW. Oh, that's too bad.

VIOLA. Yes, poor Tom. He's a nice enough boy, but rather selfish. He wanted to come anyway, but I wouldn't hear of it. I *insisted* that he stay home and take care of his brother.

LEW. That was very understanding of you.

VIOLA (*sighs bravely*). Oh, it wasn't anything. But I'll certainly envy you and Eleanor sitting at the game this afternoon and having all that fun.

LEW. Well, why don't you come too?

VIOLA. How can I?

LEW. You could come with Eleanor and me.

LITTLE DARLING

VIOLA. Oh, no! I wouldn't *think* of such a thing!

LEW. Why not? I can get another ticket easily enough.

VIOLA. That's not it. But you know what they say about two being company —

LEW. That's all right. Eleanor and I are just friends — like I told you. I don't think Eleanor would mind.

VIOLA. Oh, *she* wouldn't mind. I'm sure she'd be happy to have me. But how about you?

LEW. I'd be happy to have you, too.

VIOLA (*smiles coquettishly*). Would you?

LEW. Sure! I mean — it seems silly for you to sit home by yourself when you could just as easily come along, doesn't it?

VIOLA. Well, when you put it like that . . .

LEW. It's settled then. And I won't take no for an answer.

VIOLA. My! You're so *masterful*, Mr. Manders.

[*He beams at her. They sit smiling at each other for a moment.*]

ELEANOR (*enters center from right*). I'm sorry I kept you . . . (*Apprehensively, as she takes in the scene.*)
Oh, hello, Viola.

VIOLA. Hello, darling. I've just been talking to Mr. Manders.

ELEANOR. Have you?

VIOLA. Uh-huh, and I think he's simply *fascinating*, don't you?

ELEANOR. Oh, yes.

LEW (*embarrassed*). Aw, now . . .

ELEANOR (*hopefully*). Well, are you ready to go, Lew?

LEW. Sure. Just as soon as Viola gets ready.

ELEANOR (*her worst fears realized*). Viola?

VIOLA. Mr. Manders simply insisted that I come along with you. You see, Tom has to stay home with his little brother, because he's got the measles.

ELEANOR. Oh, I see.

VIOLA. Of course, if you'd rather I didn't, dear . . .

LITTLE DARLING

ELEANOR. No, it's all right.

LEW. You don't mind, do you, Eleanor?

ELEANOR. No, I — I don't mind.

VIOLA. We'll have loads of fun, just the three of us, won't we?

ELEANOR. Yes, we will. . . .

VIOLA (*rises*). I suppose I'd better see about getting ready.

LEW. No rush. The game won't start for half an hour yet.

VIOLA. Well, I don't want to miss a single minute of it. I'm simply *thrilled*.

ELEANOR (*on the verge of tears*). Oh, Lew, I just remembered. I — I won't be able to go after all.

LEW. You *won't*?

ELEANOR. I'd forgotten that I made a date to go for a drive with — with one of the girls.

LEW. Say, that's too bad.

VIOLA. Oh, darling! I'm *so* sorry! And I was looking forward to having so much fun.

ELEANOR. There's no reason why you and Lew can't go.

LEW. You really won't mind?

ELEANOR. No, I won't mind. Why should I?

VIOLA. Well, that's sweet of you, dear. And we'll be thinking of you every minute, won't we, Mr. Manders?

LEW. Uh-huh. (*His hand at his ankle.*) This darn bandage again!

VIOLA. What's the matter with it?

LEW. It keeps coming undone.

VIOLA. Let me fix it for you.

LEW (*rises*). There's some stuff in the kitchen. I can manage.

VIOLA. I won't hear of it. That's my job. (*Takes his arm and leads him to door right. Solicitously.*) You poor thing! Just lean on me — does it hurt *terribly*?

[*They exeunt right. Eleanor throws herself on divan and sobs quietly.*]

LITTLE DARLING

JESSIE (*after a moment, enters center from left*). Hey!
What's the matter?

ELEANOR (*sits up, trying to stop her tears*). N-n-nothing!

JESSIE. Don't tell me "nothing." I got eyes. (*Looks at her.*) Where's Viola?

ELEANOR (*points to door right*). In there.

JESSIE. Where's that Mr. Manders?

ELEANOR (*points to door*). In there.

JESSIE. Uh-huh! I might o' known. I can't leave you for a minute without something happening. Did she grab him away from you?

ELEANOR. They're going to the football game together.

JESSIE. And what are you gonna do?

ELEANOR. Stay home.

JESSIE. Yeah? That's what *you* think.

ELEANOR. Don't interfere, Jessie. I don't mind.

JESSIE. Oh, no — not more than your right eye, you don't. I tell you, things have gone entirely too far, Eleanor. I tell you, something's gotta be done — quick!

ELEANOR. What can we do? She always gets everything she wants. That's the way it's always been, and I guess that's the way it'll always be.

[*Wipes her eyes with handkerchief.*]

JESSIE. Sshh! I'm thinking. (*Paces the floor in thought. Smiles.*) Did you ever hear of Patrick Henry?

ELEANOR. What?

JESSIE (*listens at door right*). They're coming! (*Rushes to Eleanor and lifts her out of divan.*) You scram, Eleanor. I got a plan of campaign!

ELEANOR. But . . .

JESSIE. Scram!

[*Pushes her to arch. Eleanor exits center to right.*]

VIOLA (*enters right with Lew*). Now the big man is all fixed up.

LITTLE DARLING

JESSIE (*sweetly*). Hello, Viola.

VIOLA. Oh, hello, dear. (*Suspiciously*.) Er, wouldn't you like to run outside and play, Jessie?

JESSIE. No, I wouldn't, Viola dear, but thank you just the same.

VIOLA. Well, I . . . (*Looks at her nervously*.) I'll just run upstairs and get my heavy coat. I won't be a minute, Mr. Manders.

LEW. All right.

VIOLA. Excuse me!

[*Runs out center to right*.]

LEW (*sits in divan*). Well, where have you been, Jessie?

JESSIE (*comes down to him*). Oh, I've been thinking —

LEW. You have?

JESSIE. Yeah. I been thinking how *compelling* you are.

LEW. *What?*

JESSIE (*mimicking Viola's manner exactly*). 'Course, anyone could tell you're different than the ordinary run of people.

LEW (*staring at her in amazement*). Say!

JESSIE. I guess everybody tells you you're different, though. Like Lincoln.

LEW. But — but —

JESSIE. Much better-looking, of course. *Everybody's* much better-looking. I always wanted to meet somebody like Lincoln. (*Sighs*.) But I guess I'm not as lucky as some girls.

LEW (*almost speechless*). You — you've been eavesdropping.

JESSIE. Eavesdropping? Listen, I could give you that line with my eyes shut. I been hearing Viola tell it to the boys since I was old enough to understand.

LEW (*dismayed*). You *have*?

JESSIE. Cheer up, though. Much better men than you have fallen for it.

LEW. Oh!

LITTLE DARLING

JESSIE. Did she give you the one about reminding her of the statue of Apollo?

LEW. No.

JESSIE. You must've been easy, then. She only saves that one for the ones that's hard to get. That's her clincher.

LEW. You mean she — she makes a practice of — of —
[*Viola enters center from right.*]

JESSIE. Of stealing Eleanor's beaux? (*Nods.*) That's practically her favorite indoor sport.

VIOLA (*bursts out angrily*). Why, you nasty little brat! (*Makes a desperate effort to smile.*) Oh, I hope you haven't been paying too much attention to dear little Jessie. Sometimes she — she hardly knows what she's saying.

LEW. I been thinking it over, Viola. Maybe, if Eleanor can't come to the game, I better run along by myself.

[*Jessie grins triumphantly.*]

VIOLA. But surely you're not going to believe what *she* says? Don't you see, she's only trying to make trouble.

LEW (*hesitates*). Well . . .

JESSIE (*sotto voce*). Don't weaken, big boy!

LEW. It wouldn't be fair to Eleanor. I guess I better go.
[*Rises.*]

JESSIE. Attaboy!

VIOLA (*letting go*). You! You! You're the most impudent, impossible, vicious, spoiled little brat I've ever known! I've got a good mind to wham the daylights out of you!

JESSIE (*gets behind Lew*). You better not try it with Mr. Manders around. He's *compelling*!

VIOLA (*furiously*). Oh! (*Telephone rings. She answers it.*) Hello. . . . Tom? . . . You *can* come? . . . It's not measles after all — just a rash? . . . That's fine! . . . No, of course I didn't mean it — you mustn't believe *everything* I say.

JESSIE. Heck, no!

LITTLE DARLING

VIOLA (*in telephone*). Yes. . . . All right, I'll expect you then. . . . 'Bye, Tom dear! (*Hangs up.*) It may interest you, Mr. Football Hero, to know I've got a date. You college sophomores — what makes you think I'd be interested in you, anyway?

[*Exits angrily center to right.*]

LEW (*shakes his head, smiles ruefully*). Whew!

JESSIE (*extends her hand*). Put 'er there, big boy! (*They shake.*) You know something? You got intest'nal fort — intest'nal fort — fort —

LEW. Guts!

JESSIE. Yeah. You wait here. I'll call her.

LEW. Okay, pal!

[*Jessie runs out center to right.*]

JUNIPER (*after a moment, enters right*). You still waitin' fo' Miss Eleanor?

LEW. I certainly am!

JUNIPER. I always did think she was the nicer of the two.

LEW. So did I!

JUNIPER. 'Course, she ain't as flashy as Miss Viola, but she's *sincere*, and dat means a lot.

LEW. I found that out.

ELEANOR (*runs in center from right, followed by Jessie*).

Lew, Jessie says . . .

LEW. Yeah. Say, I know I've been an awful boob, Eleanor, but if you could overlook it . . .

ELEANOR (*happily*). Forget it! Come on, Lew, we don't want to be late.

LEW. That's right.

[*She takes his arm, and they cross up to arch.*]

ELEANOR. Goodbye!

LEW. Goodbye, pal, and — thanks a million!

[*Jessie winks to him and he exits center to left with Eleanor on his arm.*]

JUNIPER (*straightening up the furniture*). What you grinnin' at, chile? You look like de cat dat ate de canary.

LITTLE DARLING

JESSIE. I got a right to grin, Juniper. You know what you just saw?

JUNIPER. What?

JESSIE. The end of a very successful rebellion! I'm hungry. How about another apple?

Curtain

-

A KING SHALL REIGN

A Christmas Play

By

MARION WEFER

Copyright, 1940, by Samuel French.

CAST

RACHEL, a Hebrew housewife, a young woman.

ADAH, her neighbor, an older woman.

LEAH, another neighbor, about Rachael's age.

A BEGGAR BOY.

JOSEPH, carpenter of Nazareth, husband of Mary.

MARY, mother of the Babe of Bethlehem.

THE HOLY CHILD.

NEIGHBORS.

TIME. Twilight in December, a short time after the birth of Christ.

SETTING. The home of a Hebrew fisherman in a coast town of Judea.

A KING SHALL REIGN!

The scene shows the one room of a small stone house. There is a door, center back, which is secured by a long, sliding bar. As the play opens this door is shut, but unbarred. In the back wall, side left, are two long slits for windows. Beneath them is a wooden chest and at one end of it leans a twig broom. On the side, side left, is a shelf holding a cruse of oil and a wooden measure of meal. Also at the left side, is a low brazier. This may be made with two flat stones over which any low, wide metal dish is placed.

There is a fire smouldering beneath it. The fire may be simulated by red electric bulbs with charcoal heaped over them. There must, however, be some provision devised for Adah's lighting the candle at the brazier. A stump of candle might be concealed and burn itself out after its one use. By the side of the brazier are two low wooden stools, one occupied by Rachael. At the right side, right of the center, stands a trestle table holding a candlestick with several branches. A bench extends along one side of it. In the corner is a roll of three rugs.

As the scene opens, Rachael sits on a stool at the left side. Her hair is disheveled, her dress torn. A child's garments are in her lap and she strokes them ceaselessly and weeps with bowed head. There is a tap at the door. Rachael raises her head but does not speak. The knock is repeated but she bends moaning over the garments and pays no further attention to it. The door is slowly opened and Adah appears with a veil about her head. She puts it back as she walks slowly toward Rachael and speaks gently to her.

ADAH. Rachael!

A KING SHALL REIGN!

[*Still Rachael does not answer. Adah advances with anxiety.*

ADAH. Rachael! Rachael! It is I, Adah.

RACHAEL (*lifts head and answers vaguely*). Adah? It is Adah?

ADAH (*putting hand upon her shoulder*). God be with you. It is Adah, your neighbor, come again. It . . . it is not good that you should sit alone.

[*As she is speaking, a lame beggar boy appears at the half opened door. He supports a withered limb with a rude crutch and extends his beggar's bowl.*

BEGGAR (*suggestively*). I am God's guest!

RACHAEL (*in a dull, weary tone*). The door? Have you not shut the door?

ADAH (*glances toward it*). Why, no. It's been so fair for this time of the year; and the day is not yet spent.

RACHAEL. Fair? The day . . . was fair! (*Her mouth twists with pain and she speaks with sudden vehemence.*)

Shut the door!

ADAH (*crossing to door*). Surely, Rachael, surely, if it is your wish.

BEGGAR (*extending bowl*). I am God's guest!

ADAH (*hastily using traditional form of excuse*). God will give to you!

[*The beggar swings away on his crutch. She shuts the door.*

RACHAEL. Shut it and bar it fast!

ADAH (*draws bar across and looks anxiously at Rachael, shaking her head sadly*). I have barred it. (*Returns to stand by Rachael and speaks hesitantly.*) I knew Caleb goes with the fishing boats and you would be alone. I thought, perhaps . . . but, if you wish it, I will leave you.

RACHAEL (*reaches blindly toward her and clutches at her gown*). No! Do not leave me! (*Relaxes grasp and finishes with bitter emphasis.*) But do not say, "Weep not!"

A KING SHALL REIGN!

ADAH (*stroking her hair and speaking with comprehension.*) I do not say, "Weep not!" Weep! Weep your fill! You have woeful cause. So had I once. I know.

RACHAEL (*giving way to grief and holding child's garments to her*). He was . . . so little! They might have pitied him!

ADAH. The Romans have no pity. They showed none to my son.

RACHAEL (*trying to see another's sorrow*). But he . . . your own . . . he was a man, and grown. *Mine* was a tiny child.

ADAH (*smiles fondly although her face is haggard with an old grief*). Ah, Rachael, when does a son . . . though he be grown a man . . . cease, in his mother's eyes, to be . . . her little child?

[*As the eyes of the women meet in sympathy there is a knock at the door. Adah turns and goes quickly toward it.*]

ADAH. I will go. (*She unbars the door and speaks to a woman standing outside. She turns back to Rachael.*) It is the potter's wife. Will you speak to her? Shall I not bid her enter?

RACHAEL (*shrinking*). Not now. Not now. Please make excuse.

ADAH (*coaxingly*). She brings a gift. She bids me say your grief is hers.

RACHAEL. The potter's wife is childless. How can she know? Give her my thanks, but . . . do not bid her enter.

[*Adah speaks briefly to woman at door, takes a large water jar from her, shuts and bars the door. She walks to the table and places the jug upon it.*]

ADAH. She brings a water jar, newly made. She heard that yours was broken. She has a good heart, Miriam. It is a pity she is barren.

RACHAEL (*making an effort to think of others*). She is kind. I am glad that her good heart will never know such grief as pierces mine. (*The effort ends and she*

A KING SHALL REIGN!

wails.) Ah, how it all comes back! My jar slipped from my hands! It crashed upon the well curb! For the cry rose, "Soldiers! They search the village! They kill our children!" I seized my son.

ADAH (*puts arms about her and tries to stop her mounting hysteria*). Speak not of it! The soldiers are gone! Your son is safe from them forever!

RACHAEL. I fled with him! I was not swift enough! (*A pathetic smile breaks across her face.*) You know how big he was, my baby, though he was only two.

ADAH (*with her arms about her*). Safe! Safe!

RACHAEL. I stumbled! I fell.

ADAH. Hush! Hush! The time is past!

RACHAEL (*bursts into passionate tears*). Why did they not slay me too? I begged them . . . caught at the swords! I cried, "Let me go to my child!"

ADAH. Hush! I know, I know!

RACHAEL (*sinks into former apathy*). But they had done their work. They went their way.

ADAH (*shuddering*). Yes. Through all Judea. The crying of the mothers follows them across the land. But soldiers do as they are bid.

RACHAEL. I know King Herod gave command . . . but *why?* Where was Jehovah? Does He not care for Israel's smallest sons? Did He not hear their cry? Ah, He cares not. He is afar off. He . . .

ADAH (*quickly*). Rachael! Take heed you speak no blasphemy!

RACHAEL (*bitterly*). Why did He not wither the arm before it struck? Why? *Why?*

ADAH (*presses her hand across Rachael's lips*). Do not speak rebelliously! Our God is swift to punish! (*Releases and confesses with low, half frightened vehemence.*) Yet, years ago, when I stood helpless by my dying son, and there was no swift mercy in the death he died, my heart cried, "God of Israel, know You no pity?" [*A knock at the door. Both women start guiltily.*

A KING SHALL REIGN!

Adah recovers her self control and crosses to the door.

ADAH. I'll say you are not well. (*Unbars door and holds short conference with woman standing outside, turns back to Rachael.*) It is Zillah, the widow. Zillah knows sorrow. If she comes in, together we might comfort one another.

RACHAEL. No. There is no comfort for me.

ADAH. You will not see Zillah?

RACHAEL. I will see no one.

ADAH (*speaks with woman at door, looks doubtfully at Rachael, approaches her and speaks in a low voice*).

Rachael, a widow's lot is hard, and you know Zillah's poverty.

RACHAEL. I know her riches. She has sons and daughters.

ADAH (*meaningly*). And finds it hard to feed and clothe them, as you know. Mara, her smallest daughter, is barely two.

RACHAEL. Let her rejoice that Mara is a daughter, else Zillah would be mourning as I mourn.

ADAH (*persuasively*). It would be kind. Zillah has such great need, and Mara is but two years old. Perhaps some garments?

RACHAEL (*clutches clothing to her*). What! Would you take these last poor treasures from me?

ADAH. Nay. None would take your piteous treasure. But you know Zillah's need, and tiny Mara's.

RACHAEL (*her hand tightens upon the garments*). I cannot part with them. (*Looks appealingly at Adah.*) I hold them, so . . . and dream that *he* is in my arms again.

[*Sits lost in reverie until roused by Adah's hand on her shoulder.*]

ADAH (*gravely*). I know. But one must wake from dreaming. Life calls you, and a neighbor's need.

RACHAEL (*bitterly*). My life is empty. It is hateful to me since my son . . . is not. (*She resumes brooding.*)

A KING SHALL REIGN!

Adah goes to the door, dismisses the neighbor, shuts the door and bars it. Adah takes the twig broom and quietly starts to sweep. Rachael rouses to watch her curiously.) Let be. You need not. Why should you, Adah?

ADAH (*sweeping steadily*). Life, and the household tasks . . . they must go on. We women, we may weep, but we must sweep the floor; and bake the bread, and give the living the service of our hands.

[She leans the broom against the table, takes a candle from the stick and comes toward the brazier as if about to light it.]

RACHAEL (*puts up hand in protest*). No! Do not light it! In the darkness, dreams . . . come close.

ADAH (*much worried*). Rachael, I tell you, it would be wise to wake from dreaming! (*There is a knock at the door and Adah goes to it speaking with decision.*) Whoever knocks, they shall come in! You know it not, but you have need of others!

[She admits Leah who runs swiftly to Rachael and puts her arms about her.]

LEAH. Sister in sorrow, I could not pass your door!

RACHAEL (*stares at her, speaks brokenly*). Leah! Your son too! The soldiers slew him! To you alone, my door is always open!

[They cling to each other, then Leah breaks resolutely away and wipes her eyes.]

LEAH. I cannot stay. The children . . . I dare not leave long. Jared comes from work and I must make ready.

ADAH (*resuming sweeping*). You see, Rachael, Leah has learned it. Life goes on.

LEAH (*blankly*). Learned what? Of course, Jared must eat, and the children . . . you'd not believe what they can do, untended!

RACHAEL. Leah returns where children crowd about her

A KING SHALL REIGN!

table. (*Appeals to both women.*) You know the way it is with me. I cannot bear again.

[*There is a sympathetic silence among the women.*]

LEAH (*softly*). Poor Rachael! Jehovah has dealt bitterly with you!

RACHAEL (*with passion*). And why? I swear to you I've tried to keep His laws! Yes, from youth upwards! My father and my mother taught me well. It was my dream to give my son unto Jehovah's service! Why did Jehovah suffer Herod's men to slay him . . . (*With tardy afterthought.*) and your son?

LEAH (*with unhappy helplessness and resignation*). Who are we to understand Jehovah's will? The King is old. Some say that he is mad as Saul. He fears . . . (*Looks from face to face as she repeats what she has heard.*) how strange crowned Kings should fear like common folk. He fears . . . surely a madman's fear, but it is whispered in the gates, he fears . . . a new-born child!

ADAH. A child? The Babe of Bethlehem! I've heard that tale! Three Wise Men from the East came riding . . .

LEAH (*takes up story eagerly*). Kings, I was told! Three Kings! They brought him lordly gifts!

ADAH. Nay, Wise Men, such as read the stars.

LEAH. *Kings!*

RACHAEL (*impatiently*). Be they Kings or Wise Men as you will, tell me about the child! The Babe of Bethlehem!

ADAH (*glad to see her diverted*). Be patient, I will tell you all I heard. It was these Stranger's words touching the Babe that troubled Herod and all Jerusalem with him.

RACHAEL. The child! What said they of the child?

ADAH (*mysteriously*). Out of the East they rode, demanding, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews?"

A KING SHALL REIGN!

RACHAEL. King of the Jews? Our promised King?

ADAH. "For we have seen his star," they said, "and come to worship him!"

RACHAEL. Our promised King! Israel has waited long. Could he be born indeed?

LEAH (*positively*). *That* I cannot believe! Consider where they found him! In Bethlehem! Such a little town! Laid in a manger in a cattle shed! It is not thus that *Kings* are born!

ADAH (*thoughtfully*). True. The child was born to humble folk like you and me. They came to Bethlehem for the taxing. They are poor. There was no room for them in the inn. And yet — and yet, the prophecies . . .

LEAH. Yes, the prophecies! It's strange. They *do* read, "In Bethlehem of Judah . . . !"

RACHAEL (*musings over the matter*). Our King . . . the Christ . . . Jehovah promised Him to rule His people Israel. (*Bitterly.*) What cares He for His people Israel that her very babes . . .

ADAH (*hastily*). Hush! Your grief has made you mad!

LEAH (*speaks fearfully in a low voice*). Evil will come upon you if you speak thus of Jehovah!

RACHAEL (*with weary dejection*). Well, tell your tale.

ADAH. So, when the Wise Men questioned thus, all were amazed. King Herod called the chief priests and the scribes together. He asked them sharply, "Where shall the Christ be born?" They searched the scrolls and answered, "In Bethlehem of Judah!"

LEAH (*wishing to have her share in the telling*). Then Herod called the *strangers* and sent them on to Bethlehem. He bade them bring him word when they had found the child. "And I," said he, "will come and worship him!" Ah, that was not the purpose of his crafty heart!

ADAH (*tranquilly taking up her narrative*). They came to Bethlehem, following the star, and found the babe.

A KING SHALL REIGN!

They gave him gifts. Gold, so they say, and frankincense and myrrh.

LEAH. Gifts for a King! Still, I do not believe our King will come in such humility!

RACHAEL. After, I suppose, they went to Herod, told him of the child, and then . . .

ADAH. Nay, they did not return. They rode away into the East again.

LEAH. Herod's rage was fearful! He gave command . . . the rest, *we* know.

[*She and Rachael cling together.*]

RACHAEL. The child . . . they must have slain him, too! Poor mother! She weeps, doubtless, for the day the Kings came riding!

LEAH. But they are gone! The young child and his mother! Fled in the night; no one knows where!

RACHAEL. If the child were mine, I'd flee straight to the coast. To Egypt, where Herod cannot stretch his hand!

LEAH. You see, I'm right! This cannot be our King! Poor; driven into hiding. I can't believe it, despite the prophecies!

ADAH (*sighs*). Many babes must be born in little Bethlehem before one comes in Kingly splendor!

LEAH. Well, when such a one *is* born with power and dominion, I will believe! He must be a King whom all will fear. His enemies will be chaff before him! Yes, Rachael, to such a King we will come crying, "Revenge! Revenge us of our sons!" And he will give vengeance!

RACHAEL (*sadly*). Vengeance? That will not fill my arms again. (*Speaks with quiet sincerity free from thought of self for the first time.*) I pray the child of Bethlehem is safe. There is too much of grief in Israel.

LEAH. I must go. I've tarried over-long talking of Kings, and Jared returning hungry! Farewell, Rachael. God comfort you. When Israel's promised King is come in truth, our sons will be remembered. Farewell, Adah;

A KING SHALL REIGN!

your son, the zealot — I know his story, and the manner of his death. He, too, will be avenged!

ADAH (*going to door with her*). Farewell. We must await Jehovah's promise and the working of His will. Peace go with you. (*Leah leaves. Adah closes and bars the door and returns to the darkening room. She speaks half to herself.*) "Saul has slain his thousands and David his ten thousands, but when our King comes," so my son used to say, "He will exceed them all!" My bold son! He would not hail a hunted child as King!

RACHAEL. Poor little fugitive! Poor mother fleeing through the night!

ADAH. My son thought it no wrong to dip his hands in blood to speed the coming of our King, and bloodily was he requited.

RACHAEL (*raising a hand to check her*). Ah, I am weary of blood and Kings! That King in whose coming I could believe; He would not delight in thousands and ten thousands slain! He would bring peace to all His people!

ADAH (*simply*). Peace! How strange we'd find it! Fear and the sword's way; that is all we know. (*Looks sharply at Rachael.*) Rachael! You have been fasting over-long! Your eyes! They gleam as if you saw some vision!

RACHAEL (*looking straight out*). And He, my King, the King for whom I yearn; I would not think it strange to find Him in a manger. He would be one among the poorest of His people. My King would know the hearts of those for whom there is no room!

ADAH (*dubiously*). But such a King would be an outcast.

RACHAEL. No, not an outcast. But one who walked among the outcasts and the sinners, and yet was kingly. He would be just with a searching justice greater than Solomon's. He would have compassion.

ADAH (*positively*). Kings can have no dealing with compassion. Kingdoms cannot be governed so! Sin must

A KING SHALL REIGN!

be punished, enemies slain; yes, hewn in pieces before the Lord! And we . . . we should go softly, fearing wrath!

RACHAEL. I do not wish to fear my King. Rather, I'd love Him. I'd fill my empty life with deeds of service for Him.

ADAH. Humble yourself! Be reasonable! How can a fisherman's wife serve a King?

RACHAEL. You do not understand the likeness of my King. He is a King of love and if I served the lowliest of His subjects I would be serving Him!

ADAH (*giving it up*). I cannot understand you. I cannot understand a King . . . of love!

RACHAEL. I tell it badly. It is a vision that I scarcely grasp myself. Yet all my heart cries out for such a King!

ADAH (*practically*). You have a fever. Rachael, tell me, when have you eaten last?

RACHAEL (*unheeding, with her vision still before her*). My King. Herod is right to fear Him; Rome, and all the kingdoms of the world! Ah, I know that they will seek to slay Him! That is their way.

ADAH. Rachael, listen to me!

RACHAEL. But no! They cannot slay my King! His body they may slay, but He, the power of love that makes Him kingly, *that*, they cannot! It would live on in other lives kindled at his great flame. My King . . . He is an everlasting King!

ADAH (*grasping her shoulder and shaking her in real alarm*). Rachel! You are beside yourself! Come, when have you eaten?

RACHAEL (*brushing her hand across her face in a daze*). Eaten? I . . . I do not know.

ADAH (*hunting through shelf*). Have you no bread?

RACHAEL (*vaguely*). I do not know. I think . . . I gave the last to Caleb. He left . . . when did he leave . . . it was the fishing, you know. . . .

A KING SHALL REIGN!

ADAH. You've mourned alone since, fasting?

RACHAEL. Yes.

ADAH (*with decision*). I'll go at once and bring you bread.

RACHAEL (*half rising in protest, then sinking back in apathy*). No, no! I have no need of bread!

ADAH (*takes single candle from stick and lights it at brazier. Carries it back and places it in stick on table, speaking as she does so as one who takes the matter in hand*). You must let me, Rachael! I will not leave you brooding in the darkness, alone . . . your house the last at the turning of the road! (*Throws veil about head and goes to door, speaking hastily over shoulder.*) I'll be back as swiftly as I may!

[*Goes out. Rachael rises slowly, and carrying the child's garments over one arm, walks to the door and bars it. She crosses to the table and seems about to put out the candle when there is a knock at the door. She straightens, but does not answer. The knock is repeated. She sighs, goes slowly to the door and, with her hand upon the bar, speaks.*]

RACHAEL. Who's there?

JOSEPH. A traveler who seeks the way, and, if it may be, a moment's shelter for . . .

RACHAEL. This is a house of mourning, traveler. You will not wish to shelter here. (*Draws bar and opens door a little, disclosing the dim figure of Joseph.*) But the road; do you seek the coast road?

JOSEPH. Yes.

RACHAEL (*pointing*). To the right and then straight on. It is not far.

JOSEPH. Now God be praised for that! (*Raises voice slightly and speaks reassuringly to someone off stage.*)

Soon, soon you will be safe in Egypt!

MARY (*clearly and fearlessly*). I do not fear. And He . . . He sleeps.

[*Rachael starts at her voice and peers into the darkness.*]

A KING SHALL REIGN!

JOSEPH (*turning away*). We will go. May you have peace!

RACHAEL (*with quick protest*). Nay! She who rides your weary beast . . . does she not carry in her arms a child? Ah, I know well why you are hastening by night to Egypt!

JOSEPH (*gives a quick backward glance, steps a little into room and speaks in a low tone.*) Herod's decree has reached the coast?

RACHAEL (*nodding*). And Herod's soldiers.

JOSEPH. It is well that we have journeyed safe thus far, and now . . .

RACHAEL. Tarry with me awhile. You are safe here. They will not search this house again.

JOSEPH (*looking at her searchingly and sympathetically*). You said . . . you said, "A house of mourning"?

[*Rachael holds up the little garments mutely.*]

JOSEPH (*deeply moved*). Jehovah comfort you. We will go on.

[*Steps forward.*]

RACHAEL (*sincere entreaty in her voice*). No, no! Help your wife down and bid her rest. We will not tell her this! I'll put the garments by. She bears enough of fear without my burden! Go, by your favor, help her in!

JOSEPH. You are kind and very brave. I'd gladly have her rest a space, for she is very weary and the child, new-born.

[*Goes out. Rachael hastily lays clothes away in chest beneath window. Seizes candle from table and goes to the door where she ushers in Joseph with Mary carrying the Babe close wrapped. During the action following in the dimly lit room the Child is held on Mary's right arm, turned from the audience. A large doll may be used.*]

RACHAEL. Enter and rest! (*Leads Mary to her own stool by the brazier. Rachael places the candle upon the table and looks wistfully at Mary while Joseph stands*

A KING SHALL REIGN!

by the door.) Shall I . . . shall I not take . . . the child?

JOSEPH (*sensing her need and watching her with sympathy*). Let her do so. How tired your arms must be!

MARY (*bending over child*). Nay, he might wake and weep. Truly, I am not tired!

JOSEPH. I will tend the beast and watch beside the door.

RACHAEL (*murmurs her apology*). I . . . I cannot give you water for him. I've not been to the well today. I . . .

JOSEPH. No matter, no matter. He'll crop the grass and be content.

[*Goes out.*]

RACHAEL (*looks at Mary with increased embarrassment*). I'd offer you bread, but . . . but I have none. I've not

been well . . . a kind of fever. . . .

MARY. I grieve that we have troubled you, but we saw your light and feared to miss our way, and so came knocking at your door. Had we known . . .

RACHAEL (*hastily*). I'm better now . . . and when a child's in danger . . . I am ashamed my house is empty of food and drink.

MARY (*gently*). You give us welcome and shelter. We thank you for it. We've known the want of both before, my son and I.

RACHAEL (*stealing up and looking down at child*). How beautiful a child! He sleeps so soundly! You've traveled far?

MARY. From Bethlehem.

RACHAEL (*starts and repeats incredulously*). From . . . Bethlehem?

MARY. Yes. We are Nazarenes, but, as you know, the taxing . . . Joseph, my husband, is of the house of David, so we were forced to journey thither. The child was born in Bethlehem.

RACHAEL. The prophecies! "Thou, Bethlehem, in the

A KING SHALL REIGN!

land of Judah," The Kings! Is *this* the child of whom they tell strange wonders?

MARY (*gravely*). There were wonders at his birth. And before his birth a marvel of which I cannot speak. These things were done according to God's purpose.

RACHAEL. Then you are blessed among all Hebrew women, if this should be in truth our King. But can it be? (*Looks at child.*) So small! So sweet! Look, he smiles in his sleeping! (*The women hang adoringly over the child.*) "And He shall rule my people Israel." Our Redeemer. Can he be come indeed?

MARY (*thoughtfully*). Tall kings fell down and worshipped him. They brought him costly gifts; but it was the shepherds' coming touched my heart.

RACHAEL (*surprised*). Shepherds? No one told me that! It was all a tale of Kings or Wise Men! By your favor, tell me of the shepherds.

MARY. I'll tell you of them gladly, for they were plain folk like our neighbors at Nazareth who daily come to Joseph's carpenter shop. They made us feel at home in the crowded town that had no room for us.

RACHAEL (*eagerly*). Tell me of them! (*Checks herself.*) Nay, but the child . . . our voices will trouble him.

MARY. He sleeps on. And I'll speak softly. Sit beside me here.

[*Rachael draws the second stool beside Mary and seats herself.*]

RACHAEL (*musingly and half to herself*). "And the Redeemer shall come." It was a promise. "In His days Judah shall be saved and Israel shall dwell safely."

MARY. You are pondering the prophecies. How many, many times I think on them.

RACHAEL. My father was devout. He waited for the coming of the promised One. He often said he hoped my son . . .

[*Stops suddenly.*]

A KING SHALL REIGN!

MARY. You have a son?

RACHEL. I have a son. He . . . is not here.

MARY. Oh, you sent him from you fearing the fever?
You must grow strong and call him home to you. I see you long for him.

RACHAEL. I long for him. But, tell me of the shepherds.

MARY. They came, those kindly shepherds, on the night that he was born and asked if they might see the child. They said that they were watching in their fields by night when, suddenly, there came an angel. He was bright and shining with the glory of God. They were afraid.

RACHAEL. I'd have feared too. An angel of the Lord to shepherds; working folk like Caleb, my husband, the fisherman!

MARY. The angel said, "Fear not, behold I bring good tidings of great joy to all mankind!"

RACHAEL (*under her breath*). It would be thus the King for whom I yearn would come.

MARY. "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour which is Christ the Lord!"

RACHAEL. Can I believe? Dare I believe?

MARY. The shepherds said the heavens filled with a glorious unnumbered host and the whole night rang with their song. "Glory to God in the highest and on earth, peace, goodwill toward men!"

RACHAEL (*with quick conviction*). Peace and goodwill!
Ah, he is born indeed! (*Kneels.*) Blessed be God. I bow before my King!

MARY (*touching her gently*). Nay, rise. He is too weary for your homage now. When he grows older I will tell him of this night, and you, and your kind home to which, I think, the friendless often come. I think the widows and the orphans know the path to it well. I think your village knows its mistress who seeks to give and give again. . . .

RACHAEL (*breaks in with head bowed in remorse*). You

A KING SHALL REIGN!

know not how your words reproach me. A moment later and my house was dark. My King had found no welcome. For I have sinned. I turned my back on life.

MARY (*murmurs soothingly*). Your illness . . . fever breeds strange fancies.

RACHAEL. I was resolved to close and bar my door against it. But now I make my vow; my house shall be a place of succor as you said. I vow that it shall be; henceforward from the coming of my King!

MARY (*looking down at child*). Your King will reward you. It is a solemn thing to hold him close, so weak, so helpless in my arms, and think upon the waiting years.

RACHAEL. Israel has waited long for him. Now that he comes, according to the prophet's words, many and many a year must pass before the prophecies touching his reign will come to pass. Such glorious promises! Shall we see them? Such mighty changes! How can we hope . . . ?

MARY. Our fathers hoped for a Redeemer. He is come. These things shall be!

RACHAEL (*a light dawns in her face*). "His people shall come and sing in the height of Zion . . . their soul shall be as a watered garden and . . . (*Her voice quivers but she completes the prophecy bravely.*) and they shall not sorrow any more at all."

MARY. These things shall be!

RACHAEL (*remembered words taking new meaning*). "Thanksgiving and the voice of them that make merry . . . their children . . . (*Again she struggles for control and is victorious.*) their children also shall be . . . as aforetime." It is enough.

[*Joseph appears in the doorway.*]

JOSEPH. If you have rested, it is best that we go on. No one stirs abroad.

MARY (*rising*). I am ready. (*Looking at Rachael with concern.*) Now, you too must rest, grow well and strong and call your son home to you.

A KING SHALL REIGN:

[*Joseph moves quietly to Mary and draws her to the door.*

RACHAEL. Yes . . . "as aforetime."

MARY. Many thanks for your gracious shelter. Had we known, we would not trouble you. (*Explains to Joseph.*) You see, she has been very ill.

JOSEPH. Jehovah grant you healing and be gracious unto you!

[*Rachael suddenly takes the lighted candle and swiftly lights all the other candles in the branches. She walks to the door where the others stand, and speaks.*

RACHAEL. So may it be, for I am healed and whole again!

If you should pass this road again you'll find my door is open and there will be bread!

MARY. Your welcome is enough. Farewell.

RACHAEL. One more look upon my King! (*She looks at the baby which Mary extends toward her and shields the light with a careful hand.*) Farewell, you who are favored among Hebrew women! Farewell, my King! I'll keep my vow!

[*She holds the candle high as Joseph and Mary go out, and stands lighting the path in the doorway. She reenters the room leaving the door unbarred and partly open. She places the light upon the table and, going to the chest, takes the child's clothing from it. She returns to the table and piles the garments neatly with caressing gestures. Adah enters hastily. She carries a flat loaf of bread.*

ADAH (*panting*). Rachael! What are you doing? I saw your light. I thought I saw dim figures on the road. I came as quickly as I could!

RACHAEL (*turning radiant face to her*). Adah! Adah, it is true! Christ the Redeemer, He is born indeed! And He was here . . . here in this very house held in his mother's arms!

ADAH (*sinks down on bench*). A vision! You have seen a vision . . . being worn with grief and fasting!

RACHAEL. No vision, but the very child himself, the Babe

A KING SHALL REIGN!

of Bethlehem! Dear friend, I'll tell you all. Sit by me while I start my household tasks afresh.

[Goes to shelf and returns with oil and meal. Adah watches her in utter amazement.]

ADAH. I left you broken; bowed with grief, but now . . . you would bake? But I have brought you bread.

(Breaks off bit and holds it out to her.) Here! Eat!

RACHAEL. First I must set about my baking. Guests must not find me empty handed, and this house will know many guests! It will be home for the friendless and the needy. *(Touches clothing gently.)* And I shall give . . . and give again.

ADAH. Rachael!

RACHAEL. Thus would I serve my King who comes with peace and goodwill to men! I must be busy! I have much to do! There must be bread for all who come!

Curtain

-

“UTTER RELAXATION”

By

BERT GRISCOM

Copyright, 1940, by Samuel French.

CAST

WILBUR EDMONDSON.

AMY EDMONDSON, *his wife.*

ELLA, *their maid of all work.*

EMMA FROSWICK, *Amy's friend.*

ARTHUR CLEMENT, *Wilbur's employer.*

JOE McGRATH, *the telephone repair man.*

THE PLACE. Any place.

THE TIME. 9 A. M.

THE SCENE. The spare bedroom of the Edmondson's.

“UTTER RELAXATION”

At the rise of the curtain Wilbur is in bed unseen by the audience. His head is covered by the bed clothes. Presently the alarm clock on bed table right of bed rings sharply. Wilbur pays no attention as he turns over. As it continues to ring he reaches out, groping for it. As his hand reaches it, it suddenly stops ringing. He turns over and buries himself under the blankets again. After a moment the clock rings again. At first he pays no attention to it, but as it continues to ring he reaches for it. Picking it up he takes it under the covers with him, and it stops ringing. Silence prevails for a moment. The telephone rings. Wilbur pays no attention. On the third ring, Amy enters from left.

AMY (*standing in doorway*). Was that the phone, Wilbur? Wilbur, was that the phone? (*Phone rings.*) Hmmmmm. (*Crosses and presumably raises window shade and puts window down. The room is flooded with light. Crosses to phone.*) Hello? Oh, hello, Em. How are you? Just fine, thanks. Hmmm? Oh, yes, at Alice's for bridge this afternoon. You're going aren't you? I'm glad. I was afraid you wouldn't after what happened there last month. Listen, Em, could you stop here and pick me up on your way over? That's fine, because I want you to help me decide something. Yes. Better try and drop in a little early. You can't? Oh, that's too bad, Em. I've just got to see you. Honestly I need your advice. Hmmm? This morning? Good. In about ten minutes, then. Yes. All right. Thanks, darling. Goodbye. (*Hangs up.*) Wilbur. Wilbur. (*Shakes him.*) Wake up, dear. [*Wilbur grunts. Turns over on his back.*]

"UTTER RELAXATION"

AMY. How are you feeling this morning, dear?

WILBUR (*sleepily with eyes closed*). Hmmm?

AMY. How are you feeling this morning? (*Pause. After looking at him for a moment.*) Oh, well. (*Crosses to chair down left. Picks up a pair of trousers and a pair of shoes. On the way into the closet she drops the shoes.*) Oh, dear.

[*Continues into the closet. Leaves clothes. Returns for shoes. Drops them again as she disappears from view.*]

WILBUR (*as the second shoe dropping rouses him*). Huh?
What was that you said?

AMY (*in closet*). How are you feeling this morning?
(*Wilbur has gone back to sleep. Comes from closet crossing to left of bed.*) How are you feeling this morning?
(*He has turned over on his right side. Shakes him.*) Wilbur.

WILBUR (*rousing and turning*). Huh? What? (*Opens eyes.*) Oh, it's you.

[*Turns over again.*]

AMY. How are you feeling this morning, dear?

WILBUR (*sleepily*). All right.

AMY (*crosses to chair down right. Picks up dress on it. Starts for closet*). Are you sure? (*No response.*)
Hmmm? Are you sure, Wilbur? (*Exits into closet and hangs dress up. Comes right out.*) Wilbur!

WILBUR (*dully*). What?

AMY (*crossing to left of bed*). Are you sure?

WILBUR (*still groggy*). What are you talking about?

AMY. Are you sure you feel all right this morning?

WILBUR. Uh-huh.

AMY. Well, I'm not so sure you do. Did the aspirin tablets I gave you last night help you? (*No response. She shakes him.*) Wilbur.

WILBUR. Oh, what do you want?

AMY. Now is that a nice way to talk to me so early in the morning? Of course I know you're not feeling quite

“UTTER RELAXATION”

yourself. (*Picks up his dressing gown from foot of bed. Hangs it in closet.*) But nevertheless you don't have to be so cross. You were getting a cold last night and it's most probably gotten much worse. I suppose that accounts for your disposition this morning.

[*Has returned to side of bed. Stands looking at him.*]

WILBUR (*looking up at her*). What are you raving about?

AMY. Wilbur. Now I ask you. Is that nice? Here I am only out of the very kindness of my heart inquiring about your health and you speak to me like that.

WILBUR. Well, what's the matter with my health?

AMY. You're in a condition, dear.

WILBUR. I am?

AMY. It certainly looks like it.

WILBUR. How? In what way? Does it show on me?

AMY. It certainly does.

WILBUR. Where?

AMY. In your disposition.

WILBUR (*relieved*). Oh.

AMY. You must be suffering. So I'll forgive you.

WILBUR. Thanks.

AMY (*picking up slippers from left side of bed. Carries them into closet*). You never can tell what a cold is liable to develop into. Too many people treat them carelessly and what's the result?

WILBUR. What?

AMY (*in closet*). Pneumonia.

WILBUR (*yawning*). What time is it?

AMY (*coming out of closet*). After nine.

WILBUR. What? Are you sure? Oh, Lord. Where's the clock?

AMY. I don't know.

WILBUR. That's funny. It was right here a minute ago. I'll be late for the office.

[*Starts to get out of bed.*]

“UTTER RELAXATION”

AMY. Wilbur Edmondson, you get right back in that bed, do you hear me?

WILBUR. Where's my clothes?

AMY. In the closet.

WILBUR. What are they doing in there?

AMY (*impatiently*). Oh, hanging up, of course.

WILBUR. Well, get them for me, quick. Just don't keep standing there. Where's my dressing gown and slippers? I'll be late for the office and it'll be all your fault.

AMY. You're not going to the office this morning.

WILBUR. Who says so?

AMY. I do.

WILBUR. What's the matter, have you gone nuts?

AMY. No, but I will if you keep this up much longer. Get right back in that bed, Wilbur, or you're going to be awfully sorry. I don't want to have to nurse you through a serious illness.

WILBUR. What's all this early morning clinical treatise about anyway? Cold — pneumonia — dying . . .

AMY. It's just your condition, dear.

WILBUR. Oh, for heaven's sake, Amy, don't start that all over again, will you?

AMY (*pushing him back into bed*). You seem to forget you were on the verge of a terrific cold last night and I helped break it.

WILBUR (*struggling with her*). That's not the only thing that's going to break around here if I don't get out of this bed and down to the office in a few minutes.

AMY (*struggling with him*). Wilbur! Lie quiet, will you? Or I'll call Ella in to help me hold you.

WILBUR. Ella? That great dane? That's all I need. Say, what are you doing to me? Has this house developed into a psychopathic ward?

AMY (*holding him*). It's liable to if you don't control yourself.

WILBUR (*struggling*). Oh, get out of my way!

"UTTER RELAXATION"

AMY (*calling*). Ella! Ella! Now stop it, Wilbur!
Do you want me to hit you over the head with something?

WILBUR (*still struggling*). Just you try it, that's all.
Just you try it!

AMY (*picking up his shoe from left head of bed*). All right. I will!

WILBUR. You'll never do it again.

AMY (*raising shoe, about to hit him*). Remember, you asked for it!

[*Wilbur with a screech dives under the bed clothes just as Ella appears left.*]

ELLA. What's the matter, Mrs. Edmondson?

AMY. Oh, nothing at all, Ella. I GUESS I won't need you now. (*With a meaning gloat at the covered Wilbur. Ella starts to exit.*) But hang around in case you hear me call again.

ELLA (*with a nod of her head exits*). Uh-huh. I get it.

AMY (*still holding the upraised shoe*). Now! (*Pause while Wilbur remains under bed clothes.*) Wilbur! Come out from under those bed clothes! (*No response.*) Wilbur! (*Hesitates a moment.*) All right! (*Rips off the covers. Wilbur is crouching in a heap. He looks up. Sees her with upraised shoe. With a screech he yanks the covers over him.*) Now, don't be silly, Wilbur. I'm only following the doctor's orders.

WILBUR (*under the covers*). What doctor?

AMY. Our doctor.

WILBUR. Doctor Evans?

AMY. Of course.

WILBUR (*still under covers*). Wait till I get hold of him.

AMY. Oh, Wilbur, for heaven's sake, be yourself.

WILBUR. How can I when you're standing over me with a shoe?

AMY. I've only got it in case of emergency.

WILBUR. Oh, yeah?

AMY. All right, I'll throw it away.

“UTTER RELAXATION”

[*Starts to throw shoe in direction of closet.*]

WILBUR (*shouting from under covers*). Don't you dare!

It's the only decent pair I've got!

AMY (*tossing it in closet*). Will you come out from under those blankets? You'll get overheated.

WILBUR (*sticking his head out*). I thought that's what you wanted. I'm all worked up into a lather now.

AMY. Wilbur, be sensible and listen to me. I called your office and told them you wouldn't be in today because you were sick.

WILBUR. But I haven't got any cold.

AMY. Well, if you haven't it's not your fault. (*Wilbur sneezes.*) There! What did I tell you? (*Wilbur sneezes again.*) Oh, good heavens, you're getting more cold for carrying on like you have. The doctor told me to keep you quiet in bed. (*Pats his pillow, making him lean forward.*) There's nothing better for a cold in the head than a day in bed. (*Laughs.*) Why, I made up a little rhyme. Wasn't that cute? There's nothing better for a cold in the head than a day in bed. (*Pushes him back against the pillows.*) Nice and comfy now? (*Wilbur grunts.*) I'll pull the blind down so the light won't get in your eyes. (*Pulls shade down over imaginary window. Light dims.*) Just relax. That's exactly what you need. Utter relaxation and to forget about everything. Do you think you can?

WILBUR (*weakly*). I'll try.

AMY. Have you got a handkerchief?

WILBUR. No.

AMY (*starting off left*). I'll send Ella in with one. (*The phone rings. Wilbur reaches for it. Amy stops him.*) Akkk! Akkk! I'll take it. (*Crosses and picks up phone.*) Hello? No, thank you. Not today. (*Hangs up.*) Just the butcher. (*Starts out.*) Now have a good sleep, dear. (*Stops.*) On second thought I think I'll move the phone away from you. Then you won't

"UTTER RELAXATION"

be tempted to answer it. (*Moves phone on table down extreme right.*) You mustn't get out of bed under any circumstances.

WILBUR. Mamma?

AMY. Yes?

WILBUR. Can I have the morning paper?

AMY. No. Not this morning, dear.

WILBUR. Well, how 'bout a nice deck of cards?

AMY (*sweetly*). Nope.

WILBUR. Can't I even play solitaire?

AMY. I should say not. You're always growling about having to get up in the morning and not getting enough sleep. Now you're going to get a nice long restful nap.
[*Starts to exit left.*]

WILBUR. Suppose I don't want to sleep?

AMY (*exits*). Well, sleep anyway!

WILBUR (*calling after her*). Will you come in and read me to sleep, Mamma? (*Pause.*) No!

[*Buries himself under the covers. After a moment, Ella, with dust pan, dust cloth, brush and mop, enters. She lays pan, brush, duster, on chair left. Crosses and raises window shade. She starts to mop up floor, working from left to right across front of bed, singing as she does so. Sings in a badly cracked loud voice some old-fashioned song like "Over the Hills and Far Away." Wilbur slowly peeks out from under blankets. Seeing Ella, he quickly buries himself again, making a terrible face. As she continues to sing, he squirms about several times. She isn't aware of him. Finally he can stand it no longer and sits bolt upright in bed, watching her. She is, by now, working over right, with her back to him.*]

WILBUR (*softly and sweetly in a far-away voice*).

E-L-L-A! (*She stops her singing and work, listening rather frightened. Stands with her back to him.*)

E-L-L-A!

[*She slowly turns towards him. As she faces him, he lets out a wild weird scream like a maniac, with horrible*

“UTTER RELAXATION”

face and gestures. She screams and backs down right.

ELLA (*pulling herself together*). Why, Mr. Edmondson! You nearly scared me to death!

WILBUR (*impatiently*). What are you doing?

ELLA. Just moppin' up a bit. I didn't know you was here. What's the matter? Are you sick?

WILBUR. Didn't Mrs. Edmondson tell you?

ELLA. No, sir, she didn't.

WILBUR (*looking about the room*). Ella!

ELLA (*having resumed her mopping, stops*). Yes, sir?

WILBUR. Have you noticed the alarm clock reclining about anywhere?

ELLA (*rather cross. Resumes her work*). No. I haven't.

WILBUR. What's the trouble? Don't you care for alarm clocks?

ELLA. I never use them.

WILBUR. I see. (*Pause. Then very soft and sweet.*) Ella!

ELLA (*stopping her work*). Hmmm?

WILBUR (*soft and sweet*). Come over here, Ella.

ELLA (*slowly crosses to him a little fearfully*). Yes, Mr. Edmondson?

WILBUR (*very innocently*). Will you do something for me?

ELLA (*finally mollified*). Anything I can, Mr. Edmondson.

WILBUR (*exploding in a terrific shout*). Well, get the devil out of here, then!

ELLA (*rushing toward left exit*). Yes, sir! (*Turns at door.*) Wait till I tell the Missus about this.

[*He shouts a wild yell and throws one of the pillows at her. She screams and quickly exits.*]

WILBUR (*laughs*). Oh, well. (*Settles himself for sleep once more, just as the phone rings. Pays no attention to it. On the second ring, peeks out from under covers, looking toward it. As it stops ringing, buries head un-*

"UTTER RELAXATION"

der blankets. On the third sharp ring, springs from left side of bed.) Damn! (Looks around for bed slippers.) Slippers! Slippers! (Gets down on hands and knees. Looks under bed. Phone continues to ring. Sees the one remaining shoe at head of bed left which Amy has not thrown in closet. Puts it on. Goes to phone.) Aw, shut up! (Removes receiver. Laying it on table. Gets down on hands and knees again on right side of bed looking underneath. Singing.) Slipper. Slipper. Who the devil's got the slipper?
[Crawls partly under the bed just as Amy hurriedly enters from left.

AMY. Didn't I hear the phone ringing? (*Her voice dies off as she doesn't see Wilbur in the bed.*) Wilbur! Wilbur, where are you? (*Slight pause and then fearfully.*) Wilbur! (*Rushes to window. Presumably raises it and looks out and down.*) Wilbur! (*Wilbur under the bed sneezes loudly.*) Wilbur Edmondson, what on earth are you doing under the bed?

WILBUR. Just a little plain hemstitching.

[Sneezes.

AMY (*yanking him up and pushing him back into bed*).
You get back in this bed immediately.

WILBUR. Aw, have a heart, Mamma. I've got to catch up on my home work sometime, haven't I?

AMY (*tucking the blanket about him*). That's not the only thing you're going to catch. I suppose I'll have to pin you in like a two-year-old before I'm through. (*Sees pillow over left.*) And for goodness' sake, what's the pillow doing way over there?

WILBUR. Ella went crazy, so I threw it at her.

AMY (*picks it up and tucks it under him*). Oh, so that's what she meant. I'm surprised at you, Wilbur.

ELLA (*calling from off stage*). Mrs. Edmondson! Oh, Mrs. Edmondson!

AMY. Yes, Ella, what is it?

ELLA. Mrs. Froswick's here to see you.

“UTTER RELAXATION”

AMY. All right. I'll be right down. (*Starts to exit.*)

Now see if you can behave yourself and do try to get some sleep, dear.

WILBUR. Well, close the window, will you? Do you want me to freeze to death?

[*Amy closes window. Pulls down shade and exits. Wilbur settles himself on his left side for sleep, covering his head. There is a moment of silence and Ella comes tiptoeing into the room. She looks closely at the bed. Getting no reaction, she turns, picks up dust cloth, etc., from chair left. Wilbur suddenly pulls the covers off his head and shouts.*

WILBUR (*shouting*). Boooo!

ELLA (*screams*). You better watch out, Mr. Edmondson.

It's my turn to throw things.

[*She exits. Wilbur yawns. Turns over on right side. Settles for sleep. After a moment he turns over on his back and presently starts snoring. Amy comes tiptoeing in. Sees Wilbur's asleep and motions Emma to come into the room. Amy has a large black silk handkerchief.*

EMMA (*they both whisper throughout the following scene*).

I didn't know you slept in separate rooms.

AMY. We don't. I put Wilbur in here last night because of his cold.

EMMA. But it's so dark in here, dear, we'll never be able to see anything.

AMY (*crossing and looking at Wilbur*). I think it'll be all right. He's asleep. I'll put this black handkerchief over his eyes so the light won't waken him. (*Lays handkerchief, folded lengthwise several times, across his eyes. Tiptoes to window, raising shade.*) I wouldn't disturb him for the world. He so needs his rest. But I just had to have you help me decide what to wear to the party this afternoon. Sit down, dear. (*Emma sits on chair down left. Amy disappears into closet.*) You know what a cat Florence is and you know what most

“UTTER RELAXATION”

of the girls in that crowd have in clothes, so I thought you could advise me. (*Brings a dress from closet on hanger.*) Now here's a little dress I picked up last month at Stern's.

EMMA. Oh, it's sweet, Amy. But how does it look on you?

AMY. Fairly well. None of the crowd this afternoon have seen me wear it, yet. But I was so afraid someone might have another like it. Do they?

EMMA. Well, I'm sorry, Amy, but Alice Biddle bought one just like it.

AMY. She would! (*Wilbur has been occasionally snoring. He emits a loud snore.*) He's developing an asthmatic condition. (*She goes into closet bringing out another dress.*) Well, that just goes to show you. These cheap department store dresses. That's why I wanted you to come over. Now, here's a little number I salvaged from Madame Beauford's shop over on the Avenue, you know.

EMMA. Oh, I like it, Amy.

AMY. You do? It was her end of the season sale and I simply couldn't resist it.

EMMA. Slip it on, dear, and let me see how it looks.

AMY (*slips off her dress and puts the other on*). I'm certain no one will have a dress like it. Because Madame Beauford never duplicates her frocks. Or almost never. That's about the one nice thing about her.

EMMA. I adore the color.

AMY. It is nice, isn't it? How do you like the scallops up the front?

EMMA. They're charming.

AMY. Do you think the fligree on the side around the neck is too much?

EMMA. Of course not, dear. It just gives the dress that extra something.

AMY. Yes, it is sort of different, isn't it?

“UTTER RELAXATION”

WILBUR (*starts to mumble in his sleep*). Filigree on the side. Scallops up the back. A little shrimp down the front.

EMMA. What was that?

AMY. Just Wilbur mumbling in his sleep.

WILBUR. Filigree, scallops, mackerel and shrimp!

AMY. He's delirious, Em. That's what's the matter with him. He's delirious. I knew this would happen. He can't say I didn't warn him.

WILBUR (*opening his eyes under the black handkerchief*).

My God, I'm blind! Amy! Amy! I'm blind!

AMY (*crosses and snatches off handkerchief. Emma rises, but presently sits again*). Don't be silly, Wilbur. You're not blind. You're just delirious. (*Feels his forehead.*) Yes, and you're feverish, too. I'm going to call the doctor.

[*Starts toward phone.*]

WILBUR. No. You mustn't do that, Amy.

AMY. Of course I must. Why not?

WILBUR. I can't afford it. I owe too many bills already.

(*Sees Emma. Gives a gasp of fright.*) Who's that?

AMY (*who has had her back to Wilbur, turns*). Who?

WILBUR (*pointing toward Emma*). Over there.

AMY. Why, it's Emma Froswick.

WILBUR. Why, so it is. (*Weakly waves to her.*) Hello, Emma.

EMMA (*weakly waving back*). Hello.

WILBUR. Have you seen a stray alarm clock loitering about, Emma?

EMMA. No.

WILBUR. You'd know if you had, wouldn't you?

EMMA. I think so.

WILBUR. Still you can't be sure, can you? (*Emma shakes her head no. With a sigh.*) Oh, well.

AMY (*crosses to him, right side of bed*). Now, Wilbur, you mustn't let your mind wander. I'm sorry we disturbed you. But you were asleep and I had to have Emma's

“UTTER RELAXATION”

help in selecting the right dress to wear this afternoon.

WILBUR. Oh, that's all right. Don't mind me. I'm just not so quietly dying, that's all.

AMY (*tucking him in*). Try not to think of business, dear. Close your little eyes and just eliminate us. I'll put this black hanky across them to keep the light out.

WILBUR. Are you certain I'm not to be shot at sunrise?

AMY. Of course not, dear. We wouldn't even think of such a thing.

WILBUR. I'm not so sure about that.

AMY. Wilbur! Now that's not a very nice thing to say. Remember Emma's here.

ELLA (*appearing in doorway. Has a large bouquet of flowers. Tries to attract Amy's attention*). Pst! Pst! Mrs. Edmondson! Pst!

AMY (*smoothing Wilbur's forehead*). You must try and get a little sleep.

WILBUR. I am, dear. As little as possible.

ELLA. Pst! Mrs. Edmondson! Pst!

AMY (*laughing*). Doesn't Wilbur say the quaintest things, Em?

EMMA (*with quiet sarcasm*). Yes, Wilbur's quite a card.

WILBUR (*with a lame laugh*). That's right. Well, after that last crack, you don't need to say anything more this morning, Mrs. Froswick.

AMY. He must be getting better. Don't they always say that's a good sign when the sick person's sense of humor returns?

ELLA. Mrs. Edmondson! Pst!

AMY (*smoothes his forehead again*). Does that make your head feel better, dear?

ELLA. Pst! Pst! Pst!

EMMA (*who was slightly startled by the first Pst*). Amy!

AMY (*not looking up*). What?

EMMA. Ella. I think she's having trouble.

AMY (*crosses, taking flowers*). Oh, how perfectly lovely. For me? Bring a vase, Ella. (*Ella exits. Amy*

"UTTER RELAXATION"

crosses center.) Now, who do you suppose would be sending me flowers? And such lovely ones, too.

[Searches for card.

EMMA (*coolly*). Oh, Amy. Secrets! And at your age. I'd never have suspected it.

AMY. I simply can't imagine who it could be.

EMMA. No? Well, the one person I'm sure it isn't is Wilbur. He's sick in bed. A man never thinks of anything but himself when he's sick.

AMY (*opening the envelope containing card. Disappointed*). Oh, they're for Wilbur — from his boss. I might have known it.

EMMA. Another hope blasted.

AMY (*crossing around and up right*). Wasn't that sweet and thoughtful of him?

EMMA. Oh, yes, very.

ELLA (*appearing with vase*). Pst! Mrs. Edmondson!

EMMA (*startled. Jumps*). Oh, for goodness' sake, Ella, I wish you wouldn't keep pssting behind my back.

AMY. Oh, so you're the one that's been making that funny noise. I was wondering what it was. I felt quite certain we hadn't adopted a cat lately.

ELLA. Here's your vase, Mrs. Edmondson.

AMY. Well, bring it here, Ella. Don't just stand there.

(*Ella shakes her head no.*) What's the matter with you?

(*Ella points to the sleeping Wilbur.*) Oh, I see.

Well, Wilbur won't hurt you, at least, not while I'm here.

He's asleep. (*Ella crosses to left side of bed. Amy, hiding the flowers behind her, yanks off the handkerchief.*)

Look, Wilbur! Surprise! Surprise! See what my phone call to the boss brought you?

[Shows him the flowers.

WILBUR (*seeing Amy and Ella standing on either side*). Good gracious! What is this? A wake? Am I dead?

AMY. Of course not, dear. It's your boss, Mr. Clement.

Put him in the vase, Ella.

[Hands her flowers.

"UTTER RELAXATION"

WILBUR. Who? Mr. Clement?

AMY (*placing the handkerchief back over his eyes*). Now don't get excited, dear. Close your eyes and think peaceful thoughts.

ELLA (*having put flowers in vase*). What'll I do with him, ma'am?

AMY. Why, put him on the chair right beside Wilbur.

WILBUR. Maybe I'm crazy.

AMY. Not yet, dear. (*Doorbell rings off left.*) Oh, there's the doorbell, Ella. I guess you better answer it, if you don't mind. (*Ella exits. Amy calls after her.*) Don't pay any attention to it if it's the installment man. Well, now let me see. Where were we?

EMMA. As I last recall, it was in Madame Beauford's Modiste Shop, remember?

AMY. Oh, yes. Now it all comes back to me. Well, do you think it will do? (*Showing off her frock.*) Because if you don't, I'll show you the little model I got at Gimbel's sale last week.

[*She disappears in closet, taking off her dress.*]

ARTHUR (*appears in doorway. Hat in hand*). Er — a — how do you do?

EMMA (*still sitting left. Has had her back to him*). How do you do?

ARTHUR. I was told to come right up. Is Mrs. Edmondson here?

EMMA. Why, yes, she's here.

ARTHUR. Well, may I see her?

EMMA. Amy!

AMY (*within closet*). Yes?

EMMA. There's a gentleman here to see you.

AMY (*in closet*). If Ella let that installment man in, I'll kill her.

[*Embarrassed silence for a moment.*]

EMMA (*with a little laugh*). Nice weather, isn't it?

ARTHUR. Yes, it is. Lovely.

AMY (*comes from closet as she is slipping dress over her*

“UTTER RELAXATION”

head). I told Ella not to pay any attention to . . .
(*Head appears above dress.*) Ohhhhh!

[*Emma has leaped in front of Amy on her entrance, endeavoring to shield her from Arthur.*

ARTHUR (*upset. About to exit.*). Pardon me.

AMY. Well, there's no use of your leaving. I've got it on now. Who are you? What do you want?

ARTHUR (*amused*). I had wanted to see Mr. Edmondson. I'm his boss, Mr. Clement.

AMY. Oh, Mr. Clement, I'm so sorry. Come right in. You see, we've been expecting the installment man.

ARTHUR. That's quite all right. Not a very pleasant prospect.

AMY (*laughing*). No. But do come in. Let me have your hat.

ARTHUR (*gives it to her*). Thank you. And how is Wilbur?

AMY (*not knowing what to do with the hat, absently hands it to Em*). Not well at all, Mr. Clement. I think he's delirious. He's been raving all morning.

ARTHUR. I had no idea it was as serious as this.

AMY. Yes, isn't it awful?

ARTHUR. Where is he?

AMY (*pointing to bed*). There.

ARTHUR (*seeing the black handkerchief*). Good Lord, he isn't blind, too, is he?

AMY (*crossing around to right of bed, laughing*). Oh, no, nothing like that — yet. (*Emma, after looking for a place to hang the hat, finally hangs it on the corner of the screen used as a closet. She sits on chair left again. Amy takes off the handkerchief and shakes Wilbur*). Wilbur. Wilbur. He must have fallen into a stupor. Wilbur!

WILBUR (*rousing himself*). Huh?

AMY. Look, Wilbur! Surprise! Surprise!

WILBUR (*turning over on his right side to sleep again*).

“UTTER RELAXATION”

Don't, Amy. Don't. Go way, will you? Please. Little Wilbur doesn't want any more surprises this morning.

AMY (*with a little laugh*). Isn't that cute? But it's Mr. Clement, honey.

WILBUR. Huh?

AMY. Look! Mr. Clement, dear. He's come all the way down from the office just to see you. Wasn't that sweet of him?

WILBUR (*turning over*). Oh, Arthur. I didn't know it was you. There's been so many people wandering in and out of here this morning I thought I was sleeping in the hall.

ARTHUR (*shaking hands with him*). I'm sorry you're so ill, Wilbur. But at least it's a relief to find you're not blind.

WILBUR. Yes. Isn't it? I was waiting for the firing squad. But I'm glad it was you that dropped in instead. By the way, have you seen the alarm clock?

ARTHUR. I wouldn't know.

WILBUR. No, I suppose not. Oh, well. Sit down, won't you?

ARTHUR (*without looking, starts to sit on chair, left of bed, containing the flowers*). Thank you.

EMMA (*loudly and quickly rescuing the flowers*). But not on the flowers, Mr. Clement!

ARTHUR (*flustered*). I beg your pardon.

EMMA. Not at all. They're your flowers.

AMY. Oh, I'm so sorry. Mr. Clement, this is Mrs. Fros-wick. (*They exchange greetings. Emma places vase on floor beside screen of closet. Puts chair down left.*) I'm so glad you thought of dropping in, Mr. Clement, because Emma and I won't have to whisper any longer. I was becoming quite hoarse, weren't you, Em?

ARTHUR. Maybe you're catching Wilbur's cold.

WILBUR. Say, that's an idea. Then I'll have my inning.

“UTTER RELAXATION”

AMY (*laughing*). Isn't he awful, Mr. Clement? Oh, now, Wilbur, stop joking. (*Crossing to Emma.*) Now Em and I can go right on talking in our natural voices without fear of disturbing you.

[ARTHUR *looks rather bewildered.*

WILBUR. It's all right, Arthur. You're sane. Don't worry. Sit down and take the load off your mind.

[*Arthur sits beside bed. The following ten speeches of Amy and Emma and the following six speeches of Wilbur and Arthur are read all together. Amy and Emma speak loudly. Arthur and Wilbur are forced to shout above them.*

AMY (*continuing with her last speech right through Wilbur's*). You haven't told me what you think of this dress.

EMMA. It's sweet, Amy. But I wouldn't take a chance with it.

AMY. You wouldn't?

EMMA. I can't say for certain. But I think Dorothy Avery's got one similar.

AMY. Oh, dear, isn't that simply frightful? And I'll bet she looks a mess in it.

EMMA. If I were you I'd stick to the Madame Beauford model.

AMY. You would?

EMMA. Yes, I would.

AMY. Well, that settles that then. But don't you think I better slip the other one on again just to make sure?

EMMA (*hesitating*). Well . . .

WILBUR (*right through the above, continuing from his last speech without a break*). I'm awfully sorry about this, Arthur. It was Amy's idea. She insisted I stay in bed. I didn't want to, but you know how women are.

ARTHUR. Well, it seems to me it was by far the most sensible thing to do under the circumstances.

WILBUR (*shouting*). I can't hear you, Arthur. Move a little closer.

“UTTER RELAXATION”

ARTHUR (*doing so and shouting back*). I said I think it was very sensible for you to remain in bed.

WILBUR (*shouting*). Oh, yes. But I really haven't got a cold, Arthur.

ARTHUR (*shouting*). You haven't got a cold?

AMY (*who has disappeared in closet*). Yes, he has, too. He nearly died last night. It won't take a minute, Em.

WILBUR (*laughing*). There's just no stopping her. She will have her little joke. (*Suddenly sees Joe, the telephone man, who has appeared in the doorway at the beginning of the double scene. He has held his position, waiting for an opportunity to speak. Finally he lights a cigarette. He keeps his hat on throughout his scene. Carries a small satchel. He is quite nonchalant.*) Oh, how do you do? Come right in.

JOE. Thanks.

WILBUR. Are you just down for the day or are you with the convention?

JOE. I'm from the telephone company.

WILBUR. That's nice.

JOE. There's been a complaint.

WILBUR. Oh, well, that isn't so nice, is it? Amy, don't tell me you haven't paid the telephone bill.

JOE (*having placed his bag on foot of bed, right side, starts to open it. He has his back to phone*). The phone downstairs is out of order, too, but I couldn't find nothin' wrong with it. So the trouble must be up here.

WILBUR. Well, I can't understand that. We've been deluged with calls all morning. I was even contemplating calling you up and asking you to come over and disconnect the darn thing. But as long as you're here and it is out of order, why just forget all about it, will you? What's your name?

JOE (*taking out various instruments*). Joe — Joe McGrath.

WILBUR. How do you do, Mr. McGrath. Of course you

“UTTER RELAXATION”

know my name. But this is Mrs. Emma Froswick and Arthur Clement. My wife is hiding in the closet. Just make yourself at home. We don't stand on formalities around here.

JOE. Thanks.

WILBUR. Yes, just one BIG happy family.

JOE (*with instruments, turns, sees phone receiver off hook*).

Sooo — this is what they send me all the way over here to find.

WILBUR. What's that?

JOE (*placing receiver back on hook*). Just to put the receiver back on the hook for you.

WILBUR (*innocently*). Is that so? Well, now isn't that strange. I wonder how that could have happened. I'll bet Ella's the guilty party.

JOE (*crossing to right of bed*). But as long as I'm here I suppose I might as well check your entire system.

WILBUR. Whose system? Mine?

JOE. Sure, Mike!

WILBUR. If it's all the same to you, the name is Wilbur.

JOE. Oke, Wilbur.

WILBUR. No. Just plain Wilbur. I had no idea you did this sort of work, too. Checking systems. Isn't that remarkable, Arthur? This younger generation. (*To Joe.*) A kind of side line of yours, I suppose?

JOE. Where's your box? Behind the bed?

WILBUR. I don't know. Where do you keep the box, Amy? Behind the bed?

JOE (*looking behind bed*). Yeah. Here it is.

WILBUR. It's all right, Amy, don't bother. Joe's found it. It's hiding behind the bed.

JOE (*going to foot of bed*). You don't mind if I pull the bed out a little, do you?

WILBUR. Not at all. Pull away, son. (*Joe jerks the bed out from wall.*) Oh! I didn't know I was going to get such a nice ride so early this morning. (*Joe jerks the bed again.*) I believe this is doing me good. (*Joe*

"UTTER RELAXATION"

starts to work behind the bed.) Maybe you'll find the alarm clock back there, Joe. Let me know if you do.

(To Arthur.) Wouldn't that be marvelous if he did?

AMY *(coming from closet with the Beauford dress on)*.

What on earth are you so feverishly talking about, Wilbur? Who's that?

[Seeing the rear of Joe sticking out from behind the bed.

WILBUR. Joe McGrath. He's looking for our alarm clock. Joe!

JOE *(looking out)*. Yeah?

WILBUR. Meet Amy, my wife. Joe, Amy. Amy, Joe.

JOE. Howdy.

[Immediately resumes his work behind bed.

AMY. How do you do?

WILBUR. Did you find it, Joe?

JOE. Not yet, Wilbur.

WILBUR. Oh, that's too bad. But don't get discouraged.

AMY *(through the above. Showing her dress to Em)*.

How do you like this, Em?

EMMA. It's quite smart, Amy. Yes, I like it very much.

Turn around, dear.

[Ella appears in doorway with cleaning implements.

WILBUR. Oh, hello, Ella.

ELLA *(sourly)*. Hello.

WILBUR. Don't be backward. Come on in.

ELLA. Do you want me to finish cleanin' up in here, ma'am?

[Emma and Amy are carrying on an ad lib conversation regarding the dress.

WILBUR. Why, of course, you might as well. Come right in. Everyone else has. There's no reason I can see why you should be left out in the cold. Let's have a regular convention. It begins to look enough like one.

ELLA *(crosses to right and prepares to work)*. If I don't do it now it won't get done. This is my afternoon off.

JOE *(who has been hammering at telephone box behind bed, sticks his head out)*. Say, it's a good thing I dropped

“UTTER RELAXATION”

in. You've got trouble here and you didn't know it.

[Resumes loud hammering. Ella starts to sing. Joe stops his work. Takes one look at her and starts hammering again. Amy and Emma are still in an ad lib conversation. Arthur and Wilbur have endeavored to talk but give up as Wilbur sinks back against his propped up pillows, exhausted.]

WILBUR (*shouting above the general noise*). Isn't this perfect, Arthur? Utter relaxation! (*Pause.*) Do you happen to have a sleeping tablet handy, Arthur?

ARTHUR (*shouting back*). What did you say, Wilbur?

WILBUR. I said — do you happen to . . .

[The alarm clock, in bed, suddenly starts loudly ringing. Wilbur howls.]

AMY (*loudly*). The doorbell, Ella.

ELLA (*loudly*). I think it's the phone, ma'am. (*She picks up the receiver.*) Oh, pardon me!

[Hangs up again.]

WILBUR (*shouting*). I've found it! Amy! I've found it!

AMY (*shouting back*). Found what?

WILBUR (*holding up the ringing alarm clock*). The alarm clock!

AMY. Oh, isn't that nice! Set it for seven o'clock tomorrow morning, Wilbur. Then I won't have to worry. Out, out, everybody. I insist Wilbur simply must not be disturbed from his complete utter relaxation.

[Sudden sound of a fire siren. Fire bells. Horns. Off-stage screams. A moment's pause for everyone on stage, looking at each other startled and questioningly. Then rapid ad lib from everyone. "What's that?" "What on earth?" "Good Heavens!" etc., etc.]

AMY (*rushing to the imaginary window over footlights. Leans out, looks down, then up. Turns to Wilbur, speaking quite calmly*). It's all right, Wilbur. Don't bother to set the clock. The house is on fire. (*Turns to Emma.*) Isn't that simply awful?

“UTTER RELAXATION”

[General pandemonium reigns. Everyone rushing madly about. Wilbur quickly drapes the blanket about him and is the last to exit left. The sirens continue to scream. Wilbur comes running back into the room. Grabs up the alarm clock from the bed and presses it paternally to his bosom. Starts to exit hurriedly again as —

The Curtain Quickly Descends.

-

THE MIRACLE OF TONY ASSISI

By
WELDON STONE

Copyright, 1940, by Samuel French.

CAST

TONY ASSISI.

CLARE DENENA.

MR. CESARANO.

AN OLD WOMAN.

A BLINDMAN, *pickpocket*.

RUFINO, *a waiter*.

TOMASO, *a restaurateur*.

A NEWSBOY.

A POLICEMAN.

A CIGAR STORE INDIAN.

PLACE. New York City.

TIME. October 4, 1932. About eight o'clock in the morning.

SCENE. Mulberry Street below Canal.

THE MIRACLE OF TONY ASSISI

The background of the scene is a dingy red-brick building about half a century old. The center is a newspaper booth on the sidewalk. This booth is painted green, with a window-like opening and wide ledge in the front, and a door in the left side. Below the opening is painted in white WORLD TELEGRAM. On the sidewalk to the right of the booth are several large bundles of newspapers bound with twine; on the ledge are papers conveniently arranged for quick purchase. They are weighted down with two pieces of broomstick.

In the wall above the booth is the window of Tony's room. This window is partly opened, and there are two pigeons — one blue, one white — sitting on the ledge.

In the wall of the building to the left of the booth is a dirty plate-glass window with the sign across it CIGARS — CIGARETTES. On a pedestal to the right of this sign stands "The Last of the Cigar-store Indians." He is chained by the neck to an awning support above and to the left of his head, and behind him, outlined in chalk on the brick wall, is the suggestion of a cross, done some time ago.

To the right of the booth there is another plate-glass window, with several round Italian cheeses and stuffed sausages hanging in it. Across the window is a Neon sign RISTORANTE TOMASO and under it: Soup 15¢ — Spaghetti 25¢. Under this sign is a large garbage can with the letters D.S.C. on it.

The curtain rises slowly with an accompaniment of street noises off stage. A milkman's horse is clopping wearily home, his day's work done. A taxi driver in a hurry honks his horn intolerantly at the milkman. A moving van is moving in some new neighbors next door. A woman is

THE MIRACLE OF TONY ASSISI

beating a rug with a broom. A janitor is setting garbage cans out on the sidewalk. A woman leans out of a window and calls to her husband in the street: "L-u-i-g-i! Come upa da breakfast." Another woman scolds a boy: "P-i-e-t-r-o! Come backa here. I'ma gon' beat you good." A radio is turned on with a blare of static which clears into "a daily dozen" exercise. A boy calls across the street to another boy: "Angelo! You goin' uh school?" Angelo answers: "Naw, yuh cluck! It'sa festa San Francis. W'at uh hal?" A traffic patrolman passes down the street on his motorcycle. As the sound of his motor dies away, all the noises merge into a subdued murmur which, when there is no one speaking on the stage, may be heard occasionally throughout the play.

At the curtain rise, the scene itself is slightly obscured by an early-morning fog, which, however, gradually disperses, giving way finally to very bright sunshine.

Tony Assisi is the only person on the stage, and the audience spots him in the window of his booth. He is alternately humming and singing "La donna e Mobile" from "Rigoletto" as he sets out on the window-ledge a row of new tin cups, vigorously polishing each cup on his coat sleeve before setting it down. On the bench behind him in the booth are two charcoal-burners. When he has finished setting out the cups, he claps his hands together in childish glee, takes up one of the broomsticks from the ledge and, turning his back, punches up his two charcoal fires. The smoke pours out the window and door of the booth and mingles with the fog.

Tony comes out of his booth and around to the front. Taking a piece of chalk out of his coat pocket, he begins laboriously writing a sign above the window, pronouncing emphatically each letter and each word as he writes it.

TONY (with a marked but always understandable accent).

Z-O-O-P. Zoop. F-R-E-E. Free. W-I-T-H. Wit'.

S-P-A-G-H-E-T-T-I. Spaghetti. (Stepping back

THE MIRACLE OF TONY ASSISI

and leaning on his broomstick.) Ah! Buono. That's a fine.

[As he goes back into his booth, the O'ld Woman, pushing a dilapidated and squeaking baby buggy, enters from the right. While Tony is busy in the booth polishing his cups again, punching up the charcoal fires, etc., she rummages through the contents of the garbage can, looking for bits of wood or coal, of cloth or string, or paper or food — anything at all to salvage, possible or not. She finds a cigar box, which she breaks up and stows away carefully in the baby buggy; then a charred mass of coal the size of a grapefruit. She knocks the ashes off this by banging it against the can, gloatingly feels the weight of it, then, glancing about to see if anyone is watching, slips it quickly inside her dress.

The phony Blindman enters from the left and taps his way slowly but too confidently along the middle of the sidewalk, disdaining in this poor neighborhood to act his best by following the edge of the curb or the walls of the buildings with his stick.

Clare, almost running as she reads the want-ad columns in her newspaper, enters from the left. She is hurrying to apply for a job around the corner, a job that's already been given to a girl with pretty red hair and green eyes, the only girl so qualified in a line of applicants half a block long. In her almost frantic eagerness to get there first, she bumps into the Blindman, jolting him into a snarling bad humor and his stick out of his hand.

CLARE. Oh, pardon me.

BLINDMAN *(jerking off his colored glasses as she stoops to pick up his stick)*. A' yuh blind?

CLARE *(standing up)*. I'm so sorry. I — I was going to answer a want-ad. *(As she holds out the stick to him, she looks into his eyes.)* Why — you're — not blind!

BLINDMAN *(hastily replacing his glasses)*. W'at's it to yuh?

CLARE *(with a note of despair)*. Oh — why — ?

THE MIRACLE OF TONY ASSISI

[Dropping the stick, she runs off right. When Tony, his attention attracted by Clare's cry of despair, looks out of his window, he sees the Blindman down on his knees feeling very convincingly for his stick. Instantly, Tony rushes out of his booth to him.]

TONY (*very sympathetically, as he takes the Blindman's arm and pulls him to his feet*). Don'ta cry, Brothe'.

Tony's gon' helpa you.

[He picks up the stick.]

BLINDMAN. Gimme duh stick.

TONY (*putting the stick hastily into his hand, wrong end up*). Don'ta feel bad. Here'sa you stick.

BLINDMAN (*snarling, refusing to take the stick.*) Dat's duh wrong end. Gimme duh handle.

TONY (*quickly reversing it*). Excusa me, thanka you.

BLINDMAN. Fuh w'at?

TONY. I make a mistake: excusa me. You tella me it's a mistake: I thanka you.

BLINDMAN (*tapping his way toward right*). Nerts!

TONY (*a booming command*). Stop!

[The Blindman cringes, turns sideways to Tony and shifts his stick to his right hand.]

BLINDMAN (*with his left hand hovering near his glasses, ready to snatch them off*). W'at duh yuh want?

TONY (*going up to him, speaking gently, coaxingly, and with delectable emphasis*). In justa one minute (*Hold-ing up one finger before the Blindman's glasses.*) justa one — I'ma gonna hava da zoop free wit' spaghetti!

[With Tony's "spaghetti!" he cups both hands before the Blindman, offering him at once all the glories of this world and a taste of the next.]

BLINDMAN. Oh, yeah? I'll take duh strawb'ry.

TONY. No gotta da pie. Justa zoop. Bot — w'at a zoop! Zoop wit' spaghetti, or — spaghetti wit' zoop. Alla same free. W'at you like, huh? Zoop wit' spaghetti — spaghetti wit' zoop. It'sa delish. Spattacini, he'sa make it fo' me.

THE MIRACLE OF TONY ASSISI

BLINDMAN (*very cynically*). T'anks, Buddy. I'll take duh cash and let duh razzb'ries go. Yuh can put 'em in duh Foist National fuh me.

[*He turns to go.*]

TONY. No. Stop it, please. I tella you mo' plain. (*Counting on his fingers.*) Firsta, I no gotta da pie: no stromb'ry, no razzb'ry, no coconuts — nothings kinds pie. Justa zoop. Two, I gotta da zoop wit' spaghetti. T'ree, I gotta spaghetti wit' zoop. So — w'at you like, huh?

BLINDMAN (*thoroughly convinced that Tony is a nut*). Fuh Cri'sake!

TONY (*delighted*). That'sa right. Bot — San Francis too. Fo' why? Because it'sa San Francis festa day. That'sa because I'm giva da zoop free, alla peopla no gotta job, no gotta da mon'.

BLINDMAN. Oh, yeah. Well, I ain't hungry, see? I just had breakfast wit' President Hoover, and he shot me duh woiks. A coupla Porterhouse steaks wit' French fries and all duh frills — like J.P. used to eat before the duh-pression. But if yuh got a doime dat ain't woiking, dat's diff'runt, see?

TONY (*digging into his pocket*). Sure I gotta da dime. Bot da zoop — it'sa mo' better. (*Leaning toward the Blindman confidentially, lowering his voice.*) A beega cop.

BLINDMAN (*alarmed*). Where? Where's duh cop?

TONY. You don'ta standunder me. I don'ta say "cop." I say cop. Cop. Cop fo' da zoop.

BLINDMAN. Aw, nerts! Gimme duh doime. I gotta move on.

TONY (*taking his hand*). Sure. Here'sa da mon'.

BLINDMAN. Put it in duh cup. Yuh want me to drop it? I been shell-shocked in duh Woild War. I'm a noivous wreck.

TONY. *Che peccato!* It'sa too bad. But don'ta cry. San Francis, he'sa you friend, da frienda all *invalidos*.

THE MIRACLE OF TONY ASSISI

And thisa man Roosevelta, he'sa you friend. When he'sa gonna be da president, he'sa giving all his money da man everybody forgets. That'sa mean you and alla peopla no gotta da job, da mon'.

BLINDMAN. Fuh Cri'sake, will yuh listen to dat?

TONY. Sure. It'sa beega speech he's make in da papers.

BLINDMAN. Yah, I read duh papahs, duh funny papahs.

[He goes off right, rattling the dime in his cup.]

TONY *(gleefully)*. Don'ta strain you' eyes, Blindman!

[As he turns back to his stand, he notices the Old Woman and stops, watching her with pity for several seconds. She has found some narrow strips of cloth and is winding them up into a ball. Tony starts to speak but changes his mind and goes to the booth. While he is standing before it with his back turned, polishing his cups again, the policeman passes slowly from left to right, looking at the Old Woman suspiciously. She watches him out of sight, then digs into the garbage can again. She comes up with another strip of cloth and winds it onto the ball. Tony hears the pigeons cooing on his window-sill and looks up at them.]

TONY. Allo, pigeones! How you go? You hava nica breakfast? How you like da grape-a-fruit? *(Tony stops, listening for an answer. The pigeons coo excitedly.)* W'at? W'at you say? *(As he listens, they coo again.)* Ah! Rufino's coming. I thought you say San Francis. *(One of the pigeons coos one sharp note: "No." Tony looks down the street to the left.)* Allo, Rufino! *(He beckons wildly with both arms.)* Hurry! Hurry wi' da zoop. Hurry wi' da spaghetti! I gotta gooda custom'. She'sa waiting for da zoop. *(Dancing with glee, he takes his two pieces of broomstick and makes a violin of them like St. Francis', humming "La Donna e Mobile" again. He stops abruptly and looks up at the pigeons.)* Thanka you, pigeones. *(Going over to the Old Woman, he puts his violin and bow under his arm, takes off his hat and bows.)* Buon giorno, Signora Lady. *(The Old Woman jumps guilt-*

THE MIRACLE OF TONY ASSISI

ily, hiding the ball of cloth strips behind her.) It'sa coming. Da zoop. Da zoop free wit' spaghetti. You lika da zoop wit' spaghetti, or da spaghetti wi' da zoop?
OLD WOMAN (*poisonously*). Scram!

[*Tony recoils but quickly recovers, then slowly puts his hat on.*]

TONY (*very gently, with infinite compassion*). No, lady. You don'ta standunder me. Da zoop, it'sa coming righta here, righta now. Looka down da street. There'sa Rufino da waiter. He'sa coming from Spattacini's. (*Pointing to Tomaso's sign.*) Thisa place Tomaso, it'sa not so hot. Justa beega name. He'sa make zoop wit' no zoopa — justa dishwater wit coupla piece gar-lics. Ah! Bot thees Spattacini zoop — it'sa delish. Make you fat lika that. (*He snaps his fingers.*) Fat like a poly-roly baby. You lika da zoop wit' spaghetti, or da . . . ?

OLD WOMAN. Scram!

[*Tony retreats another step and she continues her rum-maging in the garbage can. Tony crosses himself and looks up to his pigeons for comfort.*]

TONY. It'sa too bad, *pigeones*. She'sa don't eat so much, she'sa don't get hungry no mo'. You tella San Francis.

[*Rufino enters from the left, carrying two large milk cans by the handles.*]

RUFINO (*dropping the cans as soon as he enters, rubbing his hands resentfully*). Here's yuh soup'n' spaghetti.

TONY (*coming to him*). *Buono*. That'sa fine. Now I getta playnty custom'.

[*He takes the lid off one of the cans and sniffs the rising steam.*]

RUFINO. Yuh don't have to smell it. I made it.

TONY. Ah! It'sa delish.

RUFINO. Yuh tellin' me!

TONY. And hot lika fire.

RUFINO. Sure it's hot. W'adayuh t'ink?

THE MIRACLE OF TONY ASSISI

TONY. I gotta charcoal fire. Coupla *carbonaios*: one fo' da zoop, one fo' da spaghetti. I put 'em on. Keep 'em playnty hot. It'sa cold thees morning fo' da Fourt' of October. Da peopla need da hotta zoop keep 'em warm. It'sa just lika da sunshine.

[*He carries the cans into the booth. Rufino, following him, takes a soup-ladle out of his waiter's jacket.*]

RUFINO. Yeah, but w'at dose Bowery micks wants 'sa little smoke or a can o' Sterno. Wit' a loada dat stuff, dey can freeze and never know it.

TONY. Ah, no, Rufino. Da smoke, it'sa bad fo' da peopla. It'sa keep da water in da gladiators from freezing — same-a thing wood alcohol. It'sa da zoop, da spaghetti I'ma geeve da *poverinos*.

RUFINO. Yeah, but I'm tellin' yuh w'at dey want, see? And soup ain't it. Da bums don't wanta eat; dey wanta fo'get it. But it ain't nuttin' to me. Here's duh ladle.

TONY. Ah, thanka you, Rufino. Bot — where'sa da spoons, da forks?

RUFINO. Spattacini said nuttin' doin'.

TONY (*counting on his fingers*). Bot — fo' da zoop, firsta, it'sa gotta have da spoon. Two, fo' da spaghetti, it'sa gotta have da fork wi' da spoon. How you gon' eat da spaghetti, huh?

RUFINO. I ain't.

TONY. But da peopla, my custom'?

RUFINO. Dat ain't none of my business, see? Duh boss wouldn't let me bring 'em because yuhr doity bums'd steal 'em.

TONY. Ah, no, Rufino. That'sa wrong. I'ma geeve 'em da zoop. Da peopla don'ta steal w'en I geeve 'em da zoop — *free* — wit' spaghetti. It'sa nobody so bad lika that.

RUFINO. Oh yeah? Yuh tellin' me? Fuh toiteen yea's, ain't I been a waituh in dis town? W'y, I was *born* in duh dump. Yuh tellin' me!

TONY (*excited, with exaggerated emphasis*). Sure, I'ma

THE MIRACLE OF TONY ASSISI

tella you. It'sa don't nobody steal da hand w'atsa feeding him.

RUFINO. Nerts! Dat's a laugh. Yuh know w'at we hada do in Spattacini's jernt?

TONY. It'sa no deef'.

RUFINO. We hada screw duh tables ina duh floah. Dat's how yuh gotta treat duh public, or dey'll steal duh pants offa yuh.

TONY (*coming out of the booth to prove his point*). Look! I gotta da pants.

RUFINO. Yeah, but lookut duh Indian. Hada put a chain around his neck. Fuh w'at? To stop duh Bowery micks from takin' 'im fuh a ride to duh pawnshop.

TONY (*very excited*). No, no, Rufino. It'sa notta so. Da Indian, he'sa mean somethings — a *simbolo*. That's because-a da chain. Da Indian, he's a *poverino* — a poor one — lika San Francis. He'sa tell me all about it t'ousand times.

RUFINO. Nerts. W'at yuh tryin' uh do? Tell me yuh been talkin' uh dat wooden Indian? Gettin' friendly wit' old Rain-in-duh-Face! 'At's duh nerts!

TONY (*violently emphatic*). Eetsa notta da nutsa! Theesa Indian, he'sa give this Mad-as-a-hatta Island to Colombo.

RUFINO. Jesus!

TONY. No! Colombo! Cristoforo Colombo!

RUFINO. Fuh Cri'sake!

TONY. Sure. Bot — San Francis too. Eet'sa lika this. Colombo, he'sa come-a this place from Eetaly because Isabella Queen of Spain wantsa get mo' rich quicker. And he saysa thees Indian, "How mucha da Island w'at you call Mad-as-a-hatta?" And thisa good Indian say, 'Nothings, Colombo. Justa sing me a song.' So — Colombo singa song about pockets full of money and take d'island. Bot — he'sa don't trust this Indian. He's afraid he'sa gon' be Indian giver and take d'island back. So — w'atsa happen next? Cristoforo Col-

THE MIRACLE OF TONY ASSISI

ombo, that easy-speaking son-of-a-sea-cooks, he'sa put this chain on d'Indian's neck-a-bone and lead him around a dog's life. And that'sa because-a da chain. It justa means d'Indian same-a like San Francis — da poor, da gooda *poverino*.

RUFINO (*with a little contempt and a great deal of awe*).

Jee-zeus! Tony, yuh gettin' nuttier alla time. Yuh like one o' dese Chinks alla time hittin' da pipe. If dey don't lock yuh up, yuh gonna sprout wings and go flyin' up in duh sky.

TONY. That'sa okay. Nica place. No Rufino.

RUFINO. Oh yeah? Well, don't forget to pay fuh dat soup before yuh take-off. If you don't, I'll hafta, see?

TONY. Rufino, you not a ver' good man. As a matta facts, you a ver' bad man. You go to hal sometime. Fo' why? Because you don'ta trust nobody. (*Digging into his pocket.*) I pay fo' da zoop *righta now*.

RUFINO. Dat'sa stuff — duh long green.

TONY (*counting one dollar bills into Rufino's hand*). One, two, t'ree. T'ree dolla fo' Spattacini. And here's fo' you one dime.

RUFINO. A doime! Fuh Cri'sake!

TONY. Sure. That'sa right. Bot — don' forgetta San Francis. He'sa you friend, Rufino, and thees his festa day. That'sa because I'm geeva da zoop free wit' spaghetti.

RUFINO. Fuh Cri'sake! A doime! (*Sadly shaking his head, he turns and goes slowly off left. He mutters as he goes.*) One t'in doime. Ten cents. Five cents a can! One doime!

TONY. Hur' back, Rufino, w'en you spend da dime.

[*He snatches up the sticks from the ledge and plays his "Franciscan violin," watching Rufino down the street. He stops abruptly, puts down the sticks and looks at the Old Woman, who is now winding bits of string onto the ball. Tony turns suddenly and runs into the booth, where he*

THE MIRACLE OF TONY ASSISI

snatches off the lid of one of the cans and sniffs the steam again rapturously.

TONY. Ah-h-h-h! It's a delish lika paradiso. (*He leans out of the window, takes up one of the sticks and raps it sharply against the booth. Then he calls out lustily in his news vendor's voice.*) Alla right, everybody! E-x-t-r-a! E-x-t-r-a! Righta here. (*Pointing to his sign.*) Zoop free wit' spaghetti! Spaghetti free wi' da zoop! It's a hot lika hal, delish lika paradiso. (*He stops, leans far out and speaks confidentially to the Old Woman.*) How's about it, Lady? You likea da zoop now, nica cop wit' spaghetti? It's a free fo' nothings.

OLD WOMAN (*venomously*). Ah-h-h y-e-a-h!

TONY (*with gentle emphasis*). Sure, Lady. It's a just as free lika da air fo' breat'ing, da rain fo' maka things grow, da sunshine fo' maka you happy. It's a free — *absolutamente*. So, how's about it?

[*The Old Woman spits toward him and goes on winding up her bits of dirty string. Tony sighs, shakes his head, and turns his back to punch up his charcoal fires. While he is doing this, Clare enters from the right, walking slowly and dejectedly. At the same time, Mr. Cesarano enters from the left. As they meet, both slow down; Clare looks at him with a timid effort at coquetry, more afraid than hopeful that he will speak. But Mr. Cesarano merely glances at her and turns in to Tony's booth, just remembering that he hasn't bought his morning paper. Clare goes on to the left of the Indian, and while Tony and Mr. Cesarano talk, she stands there, glancing occasionally at her wrist watch, retouching her makeup, re-reading the want-ads in the paper.*]

CESARANO. Allo, Tony.

TONY (*whirling about delightedly, holding out his hand*).

Allo, Meeste' Cesarano! How you go? How's a da biz' — da mark-a-stocket?

THE MIRACLE OF TONY ASSISI

CESARANO. Not so hot, Tony. Not so hot.

TONY. I tella you w'at'sa mat'. It'sa da beega shots lika you.

CESARANO. How'sa that, Tony?

TONY. You tella me it'sa cold in da Wall Street. Okay. Fo' why? It'sa because da beega shots put alla money in da frigmatos — da cold storage. So — w'atsa come off? Da beega shots gotta cold feet. That makesa bad business.

CESARANO (*with controlled amusement*). Yeah, it'sa pretty bad, Tony.

TONY. Sure, it'sa bad — ver' bad noose. Bot don'ta cry. Look! I geeva da zoop free wit' spaghetti. You lika nice cop zoop?

CESARANO (*picking up a paper from the ledge and dropping a nickel into one of the cups*). No, just a paper. Keep da change.

TONY. Thanka you, Meeste' Cesarano. Fo' two cents I geeve-a somebody nica cop zoop and t'row in da spaghetti.

CESARANO. You don'ta mean you're giving it away — free for nothing?

TONY (*pointing up to his sign*). Sure. Looka da sign. "Zoop free wit' spaghetti."

CESARANO (*amused*). "Zoop?"

TONY. Sure. Spattacini's. Da besta zoop in Mulb'ry Street. Weet' spaghetti.

CESARANO. It'sa swell idea, Tony. But what you do it for? What you getting, huh? Sella more papers?

TONY. No, no. It'sa San Francis festa day. That'sa because I geeve it away, free fo' alla peopla no gotta job, no gotta da mon'.

CESARANO. S-o-o! You, Tony Assisi, lika Saint Francis Assisi. You giving alla you' money away.

TONY. Ah, no. Justa zoop. Bot it'sa mo' better da mon'. You eat da zoop, bot — you don'ta can eat da mon'. It'sa stick in da t'roat.

THE MIRACLE OF TONY ASSISI

CESARANO (*with fervor*). That's a right, Tony. Justa what I tell my *sposa* when she's crying for a million dollars. I tell her coupla hundred thousand plenty money for Cesarano.

TONY (*chiding him gently*). Ah, no, Meeste' Cesarano. That's a wrong. That's a too much fo' justa one man. Wit' so much mon', you break da camel's back so he's a riding you. So — w'at's a happen when you knocka da gate San Peter? "Allo, San Peter," you say. And he's answer you: "Who's a there?" "Cesarano!" "Whos's a with you?" "Justa me and my camel." "Who's a riding?" "Da camel!" And San Peter speaks justa once mo', and he don'ta speak easy: "No richa men here, Cesarano. Go to hal!"

CESARANO. That's a pretty bad for da richa man, Tony.

TONY. Sure. Bot don'ta forget da camel. He's a gotta go wit' you, and he's a don' know w'at it's all about.

CESARANO. Some-a-times I don't either, Tony. But thisa much I know alla time: a coupla hundred thousand dollars don'ta make you rich man, not for long. There's justa many ways to lose your money as you got dollars to doughnuts.

TONY. Sure. Bot fo' you — if you got it — justa one man — coupla hun'ed thousand, it's a playnty too much. Bot fo' alla peopla don' got nothings — it's a nothings. Justa buck in da dropet.

CESARANO. A which in da what, Tony?

TONY (*using his thumb and forefinger to make a zero*). Nothings? Justa one buck — one dollar — in da dropet, theesa place you dropa da mon' in da bank when it's a closed lika da postoffice.

CESARANO. Tony, you been thinking too much. You gonna get sick, ver' sick.

TONY. Ah, no. Tony's alla right. Bot — ten millions peopla in theesa country no gotta job. So — coupla hun'ed thousand fo' beega shotsa like you makesa nothings fo' them.

THE MIRACLE OF TONY ASSISI

CESARANO. Yeah, that'sa right, Tony. But what's to do?

TONY. Sure. It'sa two nothings: justa coupla birds in da bushes.

CESARANO. I heard you da first time, but — what's to do about it? How we gon' catch these birds in da bushes?

TONY. Meeste' Cesarano, that'sa so easy it's a crime. It'sa just like I'm eating da pie offa da log from a baby. So — w'at is it? You justa geeve you mon alla poor peopla, all beega shots geeve alla mon alla poor peopla; so — everybody don'ta got nothings, everybody's *po-verino*. Bot — everybody's got thisa one bird in da hand. Thisa blue bird that make you happy lika San Francis.

CESARANO. Tony, I'ma you friend. I'ma gon' tell you something. If you don't stop crazy-talking lika that, you gon' get another kinda bird. And I'ma gon' give it to you. Lika this:

[*He gives him "duh boid," "duh raxzb'ry," "duh Bronx cheer."*]

TONY. Ah, no, Meeste' Cesarano. That'sa wrong. I gotta playnty birds. (*Coming out of his booth and pointing up.*) Looka da window. See da birds? That'sa where I live. There'sa my birds, playnty birds alla kinds colors. They live wit' me alla time. That'sa because I geeve 'em da bread, da seeds, da water, da grape-a-fruit fo' da fight-a-man D.

CESARANO (*turning up his coat-collar*). Pigeons! There'sa too many those birds around here. I'm gon' tell Boss Marinelli he's gotta make a new law: alla pigeons in Mulb'ry Street gotta move to Brooklyn.

TONY (*shocked, gently chiding*). Meeste' Cesarano! That'sa ver' bad saying. Fo' why? Becausa these *pigeones* ver' sacred birds, ver' holy birds. San Francis he blessa da *pigeones* and teach them w'at God he'sa make them for. "*Pigeones*," San Francis say, "don'ta strut

THE MIRACLE OF TONY ASSISI

lika peacocks bot just a leetle. Don'ta kill you fellow-mans lika da hawk family. Don'ta be cruel da hopper-grasses lika da butche'-bird. Don'ta steal lika da blue-jail-birds. Don'ta yen fo' you neighbor's nest lika maggots-pie. Don'ta be greedy lika da pelican. And don'ta — please — marry coupla dozen *sposas* lika da sparrows. Bot — *pigeones* — justa live decent in alla beeg cities so da peopla don' forget how it'sa done. Thees — *pigeones* — is w'at God makes you for."

CESARANO. That'sa some speech, Tony, a sermon on da mount. But you forget something. You don'ta have da mountain to stand on. Just a dump, this Mulb'ry Street. Your *pigeones* can't do mucha good here.

TONY. Bot no! That'sa justa w'at they for. San Francis he'sa send them. They tella me w'at he wantsa do fo' da peopla. He'sa saying it to *me*, Tony Assisi. This ver' morning I geeve da *pigeones* grape-a-fruit. "Thanka you, Tony," they say. "W'at's da noos from San Francis?" Da *pigeones* tell me: "San Francis say: Geeva da zoop free alla peopla no gotta job, no gotta da mon." So, Meeste' Cesarano, that'sa that.

CESARANO. Tony, I'ma worried about you.

TONY. W'at'sa mat'?

CESARANO. You justa don't get enough sleep. You better get married, quick.

TONY. Ah, no, Meeste' Cesarano. Notta Tony. That'sa wrong fo' him. Fo' why? Because he'sa married alla time.

CESARANO. Sinca when?

TONY. Alla time. I'ma married wit' Lady Poverty, lika San Francis.

CESARANO (*thoughtfully*). Da Lady Poverty, huh? That'sa right. Santa Francis was — lika that.

TONY. Sure. And he's alla time happy. Looka! Here's coming da gooda custom'. I'ma gon' geeve 'im da zoop. (*The Pickpocket, minus his glasses and cane, enters from*

THE MIRACLE OF TONY ASSISI

the right.) Allo, brothe'. Looka da sign. Zoop free wit' spaghetti. You like nica cop? It'sa hot lika hal, delish lika *paradiso*. Free fo' everybody.

[The Pickpocket glances briefly at him but slows down a bit when he sees Clare by the Indian. He passes out of sight with a quick backward glance at her.]

CESARANO. Not so hot, Tony. How many custom's you got this morning?

TONY. Notta just one. It'sa bad. Bot da peopla don't get hungry yet.

CESARANO. That'sa not the trouble, Tony. You gotta charge 'em for soup justa like everything.

TONY. Bot San Francis say to *geeve* it.

CESARANO. Yeah. But if you try to give da people something, they think it'sa no good. You gotta charge 'em coupla times what it's worth. That makes 'em get a yen for it, see?

TONY. Ah-h-h! Now I'ma standunder you. I charge 'em one cent!

CESARANO. That'sa right. That'sa business, Tony. Always double you money. Maybe you get rich lika J. P. Morgan.

TONY (*proudly*). Ah, no, Meeste' Cesarano. Not — *Antonio d'Assisi!*

CESARANO (*thoughtfully*). No, I s'posa not. Not Antonio from Assisi. Well, I'll be seein' you, Tony. I get a cup Tomaso's coffee.

TONY. Hur' back. And thanka you for da hot tip.

CESARANO. Okay, Tony. Look out for da rush.

TONY. Sure. I'ma ready. (*Mr. Cesarano goes off right rear, headed apparently for Tomaso's. Tony takes a piece of chalk out of his pocket and, erasing the word "free," writes in its place 1¢. While he is doing this, the policeman passes from right to left, glancing casually at Tony, sharply at the Old Woman. Clare hides her face with her paper. The Old Woman holds her*

THE MIRACLE OF TONY ASSISI

breath till he's gone, then digs into the garbage can again. She finds near the bottom some rotten oranges which she inspects carefully, looking for a good one. She finds one and begins sucking it noisily. This attracts Tony's attention again and he goes over to her. Pleading.) Ah, lady, don'ta eat da gobbige. Eetsa make you sick.

OLD WOMAN. Scram!

TONY. No, lady. Justa listen. Looka da sign. I no gotta da zoop *free* wit' spaghetti, bot — I sell it ver' cheap. Justa one cent fo' da cop — two cops — if you like it. Tomaso, he'sa charge too much — fifteen cents fo' da zoop, twenty-five fo' da spaghetti. That'sa forty cents. Tomaso, hisa place fo' richa men like Meeste' Cesarano. Bot I geeva, I *sella*, da zoop wit' spaghetti fo' one cent. It's a boggin. You sava t'irty-nine cents. So, how's about it, lady? Nica hot cop zoop. Delish! Spattacini zoop!

OLD WOMAN (*greedily*). Didja said two cops?

TONY. Sure. Two, t'ree, four — all you like.

OLD WOMAN (*suspiciously*). How much?

TONY. *Justa one cent.* Many cops you like. One, two, t'ree, four. W'at'sa deef'?

OLD WOMAN. Gimme four.

TONY. *Buono.* That'sa fine. Come along, lady. We feex you up. (*He enters the booth; she pushes her baby buggy over in front of it and takes a tobacco sack out of her dress. From this she carefully extracts one penny.*) What you like, huh? Da zoop wit' spaghetti, or da spaghetti wi' da zoop?

OLD WOMAN. Gimme both — playnty.

[*While Tony is dishing up four cups of soup, the Pick-pocket saunters across from the left, glancing covertly at Clare.*]

TONY. How's about it now, brothe'? I'm *sella* da zoop fo' one cent a cop — all you like. Look! (*Setting*

THE MIRACLE OF TONY ASSISI

filled cups out on the ledge.) Thisa lady, she'sa getting four cops, all fo' one cent. How's about it? You lika nice cop hot zoop?

PICKPOCKET. Yeah. I'll take a chance.

TONY. *Buono!* That'sa swell. Business, she'sa picking up.

[Dropping a penny into one of the empty cups, the Pickpocket takes the cup Tony passes out to him and goes over to the left of the Indian. Clare glances at his soup, down the street to her left, then continues reading her paper. She is holding her purse under her right elbow. Tony takes his sticks from the ledge and plays his violin gleefully, humming "La Donna." He dances over to Clare.]

TONY. How's about it, young lady? I'ma sella da zoop free fo' one cent. You lika da zoop wit' spaghetti, nica cop, Spattacini zoop?

CLARE. No, but — thank you very much. I — I've just had a big breakfast.

TONY. That's alla right. You justa wait right here till you get hungry. I'ma sella da zoop all day — San Francis festa day. *(Playing his violin again, he dances back to the booth, raps on it with one of his sticks and calls out.)* E-x-t-r-a! E-x-t-r-a! Everybody! *(The Newsboy enters from the left.)* Looka da sign. Zoop free wit' spaghetti fo' one cent. Alla people no gotta job, no gotta da mon. Look! Looka da sign! Come alla peopla, get da zoop free. It'sa delish! Spattacini zoop!

NEWSBOY. Sa-a-a-y, you! Dat ain't fair. Dat's a racket.

TONY. W'at's a racket, little brothe'?

NEWSBOY. Givin' da suckers a feed wid yuh papahs. How yuh t'ink us guys gonna sell any papahs ona street?

TONY. Ah, no, little brother. It's not a racket. It'sa San Francis festa day. That'sa because I'm giva da zoop free fo' one cent.

NEWSBOY. Oh, yeah? Tell it to duh cops, yuh lousy

THE MIRACLE OF TONY ASSISI

bum. I'll see yuh in da line-up. (*He goes toward right rear, but stops under Tomaso's sign.*) I'm gonna put Tomaso onto yuh. He'll pudda skids un'ah yuh. Yuh doity chizluh.

TONY (*to the Old Woman*). It'sa bad. *Bad. Ver' bad.* Thata boy, he don'ta trust nobody. Fo' why? Because he's afraid a get hungry. He want'sa da mon — million dolla's — so he don't ever get hungry no mo'.

[*Shaking his head sadly, he goes into the booth and punches up his fires vigorously. The Pickpocket glances covertly up and down the street, then drops his cup of soup so that it falls in front of Clare. When she looks at him, his right hand is jerking spasmodically and he is trying to hold it still with his left. With a quick surge of pity, a sharp intake of breath through parted lips, she stoops to pick up his cup. She is holding her newspaper in her right hand, with her bag hanging at her right elbow, and so picks up the cup with her left hand. As she does, the Pickpocket reaches for it too, but pretends dizziness and staggers against her. When he does, he deftly opens her bag and slips out her coin purse, but fails to close the bag before Clare straightens up. Holding the purse behind him with his left hand, his right fluttering at his chest, the Pickpocket also straightens and glances covertly down the street. He sees the Policeman approaching from the left, staggers backward against the Indian and slips the coin purse under the Indian's folded arm as Clare glances at Tony for help. Tony, however, is busy tending his fires.*]
CLARE. I'm so sorry. Can I — help you?

[*The Policeman enters and stops, watching the Pickpocket suspiciously.*]

PICKPOCKET (*holding his right hand with his left*). Nah. It's just — one uh dose t'ings. Dey knock yuh — fuh a loop. I was shell-shocked — in duh Woild War. But I'm gett'n' ove' it now.

CLARE. Would you — like another cup?

PICKPOCKET (*taking the cup with his left hand*). No,

THE MIRACLE OF TONY ASSISI

t'anks. I ain't hungry. I was tryin' uh help um out. Dat's all.

[Quite recovered from his attack, he saunters by the booth, pitches the cup into the window with his right hand and continues toward right. Clare watches him with a hurt expression. The Policeman, still eyeing the Pick-pocket suspiciously, saunters along after him.]

TONY (*sticking his head out the window*). Hur' back, brothe'. It'sa playnty mo'.

PICKPOCKET (*walking more quickly*). Give it to Miz Astuh.

TONY (*leaning toward the Old Woman at the corner of the booth*). Is thata you?

OLD WOMAN (*slightly choking, but bravely trying to down her fourth cup*). Sure it'sa me. W'ata you t'ink?

TONY. How you lika da zoop? Gooda, huh? How you lika anothe' cops?

OLD WOMAN (*nauseated at the thought, she puts her cup down on the edge of the ledge so that it falls to the pavement, spilling the rest of the soup*). No. No! Eet'sa — bad! Poison! You — keel — me.

[She sways and clutches at the ledge for support. Tony rushes out of the booth and puts his arm around her.]

TONY. *Che peccato!* You eata so much. That'sa da troub', not da zoop. You sitta down — resta here. It'sa gon' be all right, justa minute.

[He eases her down to one of the stacks of papers. She leans back against the booth and glares at him.]

OLD WOMAN. No! Eet'sa not all right. I'ma gon' have you arrest' — put in jail — 'lectric chair. You keelin' me wit' poison — fo' my money. (*Weakly.*) It'sa mine! Police! Police!

TONY. No, no, lady. It's notta poison. It's gooda zoop. Spattacini's. I eata playnty every day. Looka me. Playnty healt'y.

OLD WOMAN (*very weakly*). No! Eet'sa poison! I'ma dying! You stealing my money!

THE MIRACLE OF TONY ASSISI

[She slumps against the booth, exhausted. Clare comes rushing over to help Tony out.]

CLARE. Please! Don't do that. You'll just cause trouble. Look. I'll show you it's not poison. I'll buy some and eat it.

OLD WOMAN. Let me — 'lone. I'm — so tired. So seek. Go 'way. Scram!

[She closes her eyes and goes to sleep.]

TONY (*mopping his brow with a colored handkerchief*). Oh, thanka you, young lady. You buya da soup maka San Francis happy.

CLARE (*frantic*). I can't. It's gone.

TONY. No. Playnty zoop.

CLARE. My purse! It's gone — all the money I had.

TONY. Now, now, lady. You excite'. You justa wait. You drop it in da street. Somebody find it fo' you.

CLARE (*rushing over to left of Indian*). I had it here. I know I did. But it's gone. Somebody found it.

TONY. Don'ta be excite'. Speak easy.

TOMASO (*entering on a run from right rear, followed by the Newsboy*). W'at'sa goin' on here? Tony Assisi, I'ma gon' have you arrest'. You no can sella da zoop. You gotta have a license.

NEWSBOY. Dat's w'at I said to 'im, duh doity chizluh.

TONY. Wat'sa mat'? I'ma just geeva da zoop alla poor people.

TOMASO. Nutsa! Looka da sign: Zoop *one* cent! You sell it! Chiselin' my custom' fo' nothings. You gon' stop it or I break you' head.

CLARE. But he's not hurting you.

TOMASO. Sure, he'sa hoitin' me — bad. I gotta pay bigga rent, pay da unions, pay da waiters, feed da cops, and Tony, he'sa chop down my prices. I'ma goin' broke — smash — crash. Lika bank.

NEWSBOY. Yah, and how yuh t'ink us guys gonna sell a papah wid um givin' duh suckahs free eats.

TOMASO. Sure, eet'sa doity business — cut-a-t'roat com-

THE MIRACLE OF TONY ASSISI

petish. He'sa gonna ruin eva'body. Alla restaurants ina street goin' broke.

TONY. Bot—it's justa one day—fo' San Francis. Thees October Fourt'.

TOMASO. W'at'sa deaf'? You t'ink I'ma give away da zoop, da spaghetti, da scaloppini, da ravioli, da vino, just because eet'sa festa day? I gotta eat. I gotta *sposa*, fiva seex *bambinos*.

CLARE. But don't you understand? It's just for one day. That can't possibly hurt your business.

TONY. Sure. Justa thees day, Tomaso. San Francis . . .

TOMASO. Nutsa! You make da prices come down fo' alla time. Zoop fo' one cent! You spitta that sign down right now.

TONY. No! Eet'sa gon' stay right there. I'ma geeva da zoop free fo' one cent alla day.

NEWSBOY. Give um duh woiks, Tomaso. W'at yuh waitin' fuh?

CLARE. No! Don't you touch him.

TOMASO. Alla right, lady. We don' touch 'im. We justa call a cop and Tony takes a ride.

NEWSBOY. Yah, dat's uh stuff. He's up duh street. I'll get um.

[*He runs off right.*]

TOMASO. So, Tony Assisi, wise-a-guy, you go to jail on San Francis day. How you lika that, huh?

CLARE. We'll just see about that. You're all so blind with greed.

TONY. No, lady. . . .

TOMASO. Oh, yeah? So's Tony goin' blind, w'en they put 'im ina jail. It'sa so dark he don'ta can talk no mo'. Justa cry lika baby.

CLARE. He's not going to jail. I've been standing here listening and I know what he's trying to do. He's just trying to do something for the people who are down

THE MIRACLE OF TONY ASSISI

and out. That's no crime. I'll tell the policeman all about it. He'll know about Saint Francis — and you ought to.

TOMASO. Ah! S-o-o-o! You stand on da street! W'at fo', huh? Maybe I tell da cop somethings. Maybe you get arrest' fo' street-standing. W'y you don'ta work some? Too gooda-looking, huh? Lika movie-mattress, huh?

TONY. Ah, Tomaso, that's all so crazy-wrong like a bad dream. Thees a fine, a gooda girl. Just looka da face one time good. Justa like an angel.

TOMASO. Nuts! She'sa don't work, see? She'sa standin' ona street. You don'ta see angels standin' ona street, huh? So — she'sa no angel. She's a vagrant.

TONY (*furiously*). Don'ta make me mad, Tomaso. I'ma ver' bad man.

TOMASO. I'lla make you be good.

CLARE. Please! Don't quarrel.

TONY (*dancing threateningly before Tomaso like a pugilist*). I'm notta qua'ling. I'ma fighting!

TOMASO (*shaking his fist at Tony*). Justa one mo' leetla noise . . .

TONY (*stepping toward him*). Poof!

CLARE (*pushing them apart, taking Tony's arm*). Oh, please, *please* don't quarrel any more.

TONY. He'sa call you bad name.

TOMASO. It'sa lie. I don' speaka da Greek.

TONY. Tomaso! I'll choka da socks offa you.

CLARE (*holding him back and trying to keep from laughing*). No, *please*, Tony. Let me explain. A vagrant isn't — a bad person. It's just anybody, without any money, a *poverino* — like Saint Francis. He was a vagrant, a beggar. And so am I — now. That was all the money I had, and I can't find a job. I tried this morning, but they're always taken or I'm "not the type." Don't you see, Tony? A vagrant is just the

THE MIRACLE OF TONY ASSISI

sort of person you're trying to help, the *poverinos*, the *mendicantes* — like Saint Francis, and Saint Anthony, and Saint Clare.

TONY (*as though just recognizing a long lost dear friend*). Ah! Santa Clara! That's a right. That's a who you are. I know it all time. Santa Clara!

[*Transported instantly from anger to uncontrollable glee, he whirls about, snatches up his sticks, and fiddles wildly but silently for a moment. Clare and Tomaso watch him in puzzled wonder.*]

TOMASO (*mumbling as he crosses himself*). Bughouse. Nuts in da belfry.

TONY (*stopping his fiddling*). Santa Clara! Lika da pigeones!

CLARE. But — I don't understand.

TONY. I tella you plain. You Santa Clara come again. That's a because you *poverino* — and so good, so like an angel.

CLARE. No, no, I'm not — all of that. But Saint Clare is my namesake. My name is Clare Denena.

TONY. *Basta!* Justa w'at I'm say. You Santa Clara.

[*He fiddles again. The Newsboy enters running from the left.*]

NEWSBOY. 'Yah, yuh doity chizluh. We pudda skids un'ah yuh. Duh cop's phonin' fuh duh Black Maria.

[*The Pickpocket, now the phony Blindman again, enters at right and stops near them.*]

TOMASO. That's a fine. Tony gets a ride da *prigione*. How you lika dat, Tony? You gon' sella da zoop at Sing-a-Sing?

CLARE. Oh, you poor, miserable fools. Don't you see . . .

NEWSBOY (*as the low distant wail of a motor siren is heard*). Nah, we don' see nuttin', see? But lissen uh dat. Yuh hear dat, duncha? 'At's da Black Maria.

[*The Old Woman stirs and sits erect, looking about her wildly.*]

THE MIRACLE OF TONY ASSISI

TOMASO. How you lika dat, Tony? Sweeta music, huh?

W'y you don' play you fiddle?

CLARE. Oh, can't you be human?

TONY. I'ma tired. I'ma seek and tired. Too mucha

Tomaso. I'ma gon' lika da jail.

CLARE. You're not going.

NEWSBOY (*pointing up toward right as the siren grows louder*). Gee-zeus! Lookut um ride. Comin' down uh grade . . .

[*Mr. Cesarano enters right rear and stands in front of Tomaso's sign, watching everything without being noticed.*]

TOMASO. Fo' Tony, da wise-a-guy.

NEWSBOY. Makin' ninety miles an houah!

TOMASO. Hun'ed miles!

NEWSBOY. Fuh Cri'sake.

TONY (*absently, devoutly, in a moment of silence — no talk, no movement, with the siren quiet for just this instant*). And for San Francis too.

[*When Tony says "San Francis" a bright shaft of light falls upon the Indian. While they are all silently watching the Black Maria, whose siren begins wailing again, he breathes deeply, opens his eyes, yawns with suffocating boredom and, taking Clare's purse from under his left arm, stretches his arms wide so that, just for an instant, they fit the cross chalked on the wall behind him. Dropping his arms, he opens Clare's purse, takes out a handful of change, turns it over in his hand, glances at the people on the sidewalk, then, with a majestic sweep of his right arm he tosses the money up and out so that it rains down upon their heads and falls jingling to the pavement. Mr. Cesarano, who can not see the Indian, looks up and back of him, thinking that someone has thrown the money from an apartment window. Instantly, there is a mad, cut-throat scramble, involving all but Tony, Clare, and Mr. Cesarano, who stand back and look on while the others fight on hands and knees for the nickels and dimes*]

THE MIRACLE OF TONY ASSISI

that were Clare's. The Old Woman dives into the fray like an old hen protecting her chicks, and the Blindman, although the siren is coming nearer, jerks off his glasses and fights for his share and the others', snarling like a vicious, starving dog. The siren gives a last moaning wail and comes to a stop with a screech of sliding tires. The Indian chuckles and folds his arms again with Clare's purse in his hand, the shaft of light fading out as he does so. The Policeman enters from the left in no great hurry.

POLICEMAN (*hardboiled but routine manner*). Aw right, break it up. Take your marbles and scram.

NEWSBOY (*on the run, forgetting all about Tony*). Duh coppers, gang. Scram!

[*He runs off left, leaving his papers on the sidewalk. The Blindman follows on his heels, and Tomaso scurries guiltily for the cover of his own restaurant at right rear. Only the Old Woman refuses to run, or even to get up. She is still finding money.*]

POLICEMAN (*tapping the Old Woman gently with his stick*). Come on, sister, get up. You're blocking traffic.

OLD WOMAN (*scuttling for a penny five feet away*). Scram!

POLICEMAN (*tougher, pulling her up by an arm*). Come a-h-n-n! We goin' fuh a little ride.

[*She begins counting her money, oblivious to everything else.*]

TONY (*with Clare trying to hold him back*). Stop! Eet'sa beega mistake. Da lady, she'sa don' do nothings. I'ma da bad man.

POLICEMAN (*leading the Old Woman, who is frantically counting her money, off right*). Go wan! Peddle yuh papahs. I know all about it.

TONY (*starting to follow*). Bot da lady . . .

CLARE (*taking his arm*). It's all right. He knows.

OLD WOMAN (*offstage*). My money! Eet'sa gone!

POLICEMAN. Come a-h-n! You got yuh money.

THE MIRACLE OF TONY ASSISI

OLD WOMAN (*more distantly*). No. Eet'sa gone! My money!

TONY. *Che peccato!* Da poor old lady. It's alla my fault. I'ma da cause all trouble.

CLARE. No, Tony. It's not your fault at all.

MR. CESARANO (*stepping forward and kicking aside the Newsboy's papers, he picks up a cashier's money bag*). I don'ta think it is, Tony. It's just one thing that's making all da people mo' crazy than you: it's da mon. Looka this.

[*He puts his hand into the bag and brings it out full of gold coins, letting them fall slowly back into the bag.*]

CLARE. Gold!

TONY. Tomaso's! He drop it in da scrapple.

CESARANO. No. It's *notta* Tomaso's. I was watching da fight. It falls out of da Old Woman's dress. That'sa you' "poor old lady," Tony.

CLARE. You see! She doesn't need your help.

TONY (*delighted*). Sure! That'sa da troub'. That'sa w'at she's crying for. Run queek, Meeste' Cesarano, so she don'ta cry no mo', so they don'ta lock her up where it'sa cold and dark lika jail-bird. And pusha da buggy wit' you.

CESARANO (*studying him thoughtfully, then speaking with awe and admiration*). You a stranga man, Tony Assisi. Maybe you not a man — something else — something like a ghost. But anyway, I'll do it for you, Tony. I'll take da mon' and da buggy right now. Maybe it'sa gon' make me feel better.

[*Pushing the buggy ahead of him, he goes toward right.*]

TONY. Tell her don'ta cry no mo'.

CESARANO (*stopping*). Okay, Tony. Then I'm gon' tell my *sposa* something. I'm gon' tell her what breaks da camel's back.

[*He goes off.*]

TONY (*shouting after him*). That'sa fine, bot — don' forgetta speak easy. Don'ta make her cry. (*To*

THE MIRACLE OF TONY ASSISI

CLARE.) Oh, bot that's a fine-a-man, Meeste' Cesarano, da gooda rich man.

CLARE. Yes. He is good. I know he is. But oh, Tony, why aren't there more men, and women too, like him?

TONY. Ah, I don'ta know. Maybe just because they so afraid — maybe just because they forget about San Francis.

CLARE. Yes. That's it. We're all afraid, and that makes us forget.

TONY. Bot notta you.

CLARE. Oh yes! I am, Tony. I am. I'd forgotten nearly everything — just being afraid. But I used to know Saint Francis, and Saint Anthony and Saint Clare. And I wanted to be like her. I used to try very hard — but — not now.

TONY. Bot you are! Santa Clare come again.

CLARE. Ah, no, Tony. There was something I wanted more: money to buy pretty clothes and things like that — to live like some girls do. So I went to a business school and learned to be a stenographer. That was easy enough, while my money lasted. But they didn't teach me — any of us — how to get a job when there aren't any jobs. We've just learned how cruel — what a mess — everything is. And I've learned it isn't money, or pretty clothes, or freedom I want. It's just peace, Tony. A place to live without being afraid.

TONY. I know. Don'ta cry. Everything's gon' be all right. San Francis, he's you' friend. He don' forget you.

CLARE. But I do. I forget, Tony. Sometimes I'm just one big *want*. I want everything — money, and pretty things, and excitement — and sometimes just soup. Just plain soup *without* spaghetti.

TONY. That'sa all right. You gotta be happy. That'sa w'at you live for. San Francis, he'sa ver' happy. He

THE MIRACLE OF TONY ASSISI

play his violin wit' coupla sticks, lika this. (*He plays his violin briefly.*) How you lika that?

CLARE (*laughing gleefully*). Oh, Tony! You're swell!

TONY. Ah, no. Notta me. It'sa you. You are swell!

CLARE. No! You are.

TONY (*pointing to each*). Okay. You're swell. I'ma swell. Da pigeones, they swell. D'Indian, he'sa swell. Everybody . . .

[*They are looking at the Indian. Tony breaks off when the shaft of light falls again upon the Indian.*]

INDIAN. Thank you, Tony.

[*He tosses Clare's purse at her feet, then smiles broadly.*]

TONY (*as he greeted Mr. Cesarano*). Allo! San Francis!

INDIAN. How am I doing, Tony?

TONY. Swell!

CLARE. Tony! It's — a miracle!

INDIAN. And why not?

TONY (*very casually*). Sure. W'y not? Don'ta be excite'. (*To the Indian.*) It's about time fo' a miracle, huh? W'at you want us do now? Da zoop justa make mo' trouble everybody. So — w'at now?

INDIAN (*matter-of-factly*). That's an easy one, Tony. "Freely have you received, freely give. Carry neither gold nor silver nor money in your girdles, nor bag, nor two coats, nor sandals, nor staff; for the workman is worthy of his hire."

[*As the Indian finishes speaking, he freezes into his original statuesque pose. Clare takes Tony's hand and they stand a moment perfectly still, looking at him with childlike reverence. The light fades out.*]

TONY (*matter-of-factly*). That'sa right, Clara. "Da working man is worthy of his hire." It'sa good to work. I tell you w'at we gon' do. I'ma gon' geeva you da job. You help me sella da papers and we do

THE MIRACLE OF TONY ASSISI

everything San Francis say, alla time together. Lika San Francis and Santa Clara. W'at you say, huh?

CLARE (*fervently*). Oh, yes, Tony, I — will. Only — teach me, Tony, to be good, really worthy — of my hire.

TONY. Grape-a-nuts and nonsense! You playnty good already, bot — I'ma gon' teach you sella da papers. For why? So lika San Francis say: you gon' be worthy of da zoop. How's about it?

CLARE. Of course. That's just what I want to be.

TONY. Okay. Go in da boot'. Stick you' neck out.

[*She enters the booth and leans out the window.*]

CLARE (*smiling, mimicking Tony's accent*). Lika thees?

TONY. *Buono*. That'sa swell. Now thees is w'at you say: (*In his news vendor's tone.*) Looka! Looka! Everybody looka! Get you' morning papah righta here, righta now.

CLARE. Looka! Looka! Everybody looka! Get you' morning papah righta here, righta now.

TONY. That'sa fine. Bot — stick you' neck out some mo'. (*She does.*) Okay: Read all about da New Deal, da speecha Roosevelta.

CLARE. Read all about da New Deal, da speecha Roosevelta.

TONY. He'sa gon' geeve all da mon away. Alla peopla no gotta job, no gotta da mon.

CLARE. He'sa gon' geeve all da mon away. Alla peopla no gotta job, no gotta da mon.

TONY. Everybody's gon' be *poverino*.

CLARE. Everybody's gon' be *poverino*.

TONY. Everybody's gon' be happy.

CLARE. Everybody's gon' be happy.

TONY. Looka! Looka! Everybody!

[*He begins playing his "violin" with very gay flourishes.*]

CLARE. Looka! Looka! Everybody! Let'sa be happy!

[*Picking up one of the tin cups, she begins humming*]

THE MIRACLE OF TONY ASSISI

"La Donna e Mobile," waving the cup in time with Tony's playing.

TONY. That's a swell! Let's a be happy!

[As he too begins humming, the light that was on the Indian falls upon Clare in the booth. At once Tony's "violin" becomes a symphony orchestra that fills all of Mulberry Street with gay music, drowns out all the discord of human and mechanical traffic, and starts all of its people humming together "La donna e Mobile." Upon this minor miracle, the curtain slowly falls.]

The End

WHERE THE BUFFALO ROAM

By

DORA M. HOOPER

CAST

WILL MYERS, a farmer, about fifty, easy going, content with farm life.

TED, his son, about seventeen, preparing for college in the fall.

EM, Will's wife, cheerful, plump and vivacious. She rather prides herself on her histrionic ability. Three years ago a hitherto unheard-of gentleman from England gave her the award of best Provincial actress, and Em has glowed ever since.

JOANNA MYERS, Will's sister, an English schoolmistress, dressed like an English schoolmistress. It is her first visit to Canada. She combines extreme romanticism with a certain fund of sound commonsense.

PETE, Blackfoot Indian, odd-job-man about the Myers' house.

EFFIE, sister to Ted, aged about thirteen, a lively but generally law-abiding young woman.

WHERE THE BUFFALO ROAM

The living room of a prosperous farmhouse in one of the Canadian Prairie Provinces. It is nearly noon on a sunny winter's morning. Through the window the snowy prairie is visible. The path to the door leads past the window. The large bay window, complete with window seat, occupies most of the back wall. Upstage right, a door leads to the kitchen and back quarters of the house. Downstage left, a door leads to the entrance hall. Right centre, there is a large stone fireplace. Upstage left a flight of stairs leads to the bedrooms. Only the first three stairs are visible, facing the audience, then the staircase bends sharply and is lost to view. Downstage of the fireplace there is a small open bookcase, and upstage there is a small cupboard, on top of which various family photos, vases, etc., are displayed. There is a dining table with hard chairs upstage centre, a rocker by the fire, and an arm chair downstage left. On the left wall, between the door and the stairs, a large collection of guns and revolvers is arranged, and a moose head is fixed over the fireplace. The whole room suggests cheerful prosperity. The room is light, the curtains are bright, and the cushions on the window seat match them. There are gay cushions in the easy chairs, and the books in the bookcase are colorful.

When the curtain rises, Ted and Will are at the table. Ted is studying, fingers in ears. Will is sorting specimens of grain laboriously into little boxes. In the kitchen Em can be heard adding to the busy clatter she is making as she sings "Home on the Range" with more gusto than beauty. She also seems to be arranging saucepan lids with difficulty. The two in the room make no sound, but every time the kitchen noises become excessive, Ted squirms and thrusts his fingers further into his ears.

WHERE THE BUFFALO ROAM

WILL (*looking towards kitchen door*). What's biting her?

TED. Aunt Joanna.

[*Silence within the room. Outside, the noises increase.*]

WILL. What's she doing, anyway?

TED. When I came through she was polishing the bottoms of the saucepans.

WILL. Good Lord!

TED. Said she wanted everything bright for Aunt Joanna.

[*The door opens. Em comes in, still singing. She wears a bright house dress and a perky apron. She carries a pot of early red tulips which she places on the table, standing back to admire the effect.*]

EM. There, I think that's everything. Doesn't it all look nice? (*She hovers around the room, plumping up cushions, etc., and starts again on "Home on the Range." Ted puts his fingers in his ears again and Will returns to his sorting. When Em reaches "Where seldom is heard a discouraging word" she breaks off and comes over to Ted.*) Best put your books up now, son; she'll be here any minute. (*She leans over him and sees what he is reading.*) Macbeth! (*Suddenly, with tremendous vigor.*) "Out, damned spot, out I say. One two; why then 'tis time to do it. (*Em walks a little from table, the better to perform.*) Hell is murky! (*She turns on Will.*) Fie, my Lord, Fie! A soldier and afeard? (*Will takes his pipe out of his mouth.*) . . . Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him?"

WILL. Cut it out, Em!

[*Will rises and picks up boxes.*]

EM (*in a hissing whisper*). "The Thane of Fife had a wife; where is she now?" I wonder if Joanna can act. They want an elderly woman with an English voice for the festival.

WILL (*moving towards kitchen*). No, she can't. And

WHERE THE BUFFALO ROAM

anyway, one in the family is quite enough. (*Spanks Em fondly on the rear.*) You're looking very perky, mother; new dress and all.

EM. It's for Joanna.

TED. You'd think we led mother an awful life, the fuss she makes when there's a visitor coming.

EM. I love having visitors. Did Pete go to the station?

WILL. Yes. He took the sleigh.

EM. Oh, dear! I do hope he keeps sober. One's never sure when he goes to the station. If he gets there early he's bound to find a pal with a bottle of rye. It would be awful if he upset Joanna into a snowdrift. It's such a lovely day.

WILL. Well, it would give her a taste of the Canadian life she's longing for.

EM. You know, this place is nice. I bet Joanna will like it.

WILL. She'll be disappointed.

EM. Well, if she is, she must be very hard to please. This is the prettiest farm in two provinces, and what's more, it pays. Our crops are good, our horses sturdy; Ted's going to college in the fall, Effie's doing well at school; I'm a good cook and you're a good husband. What more can anybody want?

WILL. That's just it. I've told you Joanna's a romantic, an incurable romantic. Moreover, she loves a lost cause. Also, she hasn't enough to do. That girl's been teaching school in England for twenty years, and all she seems to have done to improve her mind is read dismal stories of the wild West.

TED. They're not all dismal.

WILL. The ones she reads are. She's got a notion that your mother will soon be stark staring crazy in this lonely spot, and that we live on huskings and apples provided by relief. (*He holds out boxes.*) Where will I put these? I suppose I can't leave them in here.

WHERE THE BUFFALO ROAM

EM. No, you cannot. Put them in the kitchen.

[*Will goes out.*]

TED. I wish she weren't coming. You can't study with an aunt around the place. I bet she's awful.

EM. She's not. She's very intelligent. (*With awe.*) She's an M.A. She knows such a lot. She'll be able to coach you, Ted. (*Ted groans.*) Anyway, it's not for long. (*Will comes back.*) I do hope she won't be disappointed. I want her to enjoy herself. How do you know she thinks like you say, Will?

WILL. She told me so in her letters.

EM. Well, didn't you tell her the truth?

WILL. I did not. If that woman gets pleasure from thinking my roof leaks and my crops fail, I'm not the one to spoil it for her. Besides, she thinks I'm a fine fellow. She thinks I shoot Indians.

TED. Dad!

EM. Oh, Will, how could you? Why, you can't even keep Pete in order when he's drunk.

WILL. Neither could the people who did shoot Indians. She thinks we've got buffalo all around us too.

EM. Did you tell her that?

WILL. No. She told me.

EM. But why didn't you tell me all this before?

WILL. You didn't ask.

EM. Oh, my heavens! Haven't you any initiative? (*She looks forlornly around the room.*) Now what are we going to do? She'll be here any minute. And she'll be disappointed in this place. And it is so nice. She won't like the tulips or my new dress or anything. (*Proudly.*) Does she know Ted's going to college?

WILL. In her last letter she said she supposed we hadn't the money to send him.

TED. But didn't you tell her I was going? Didn't you tell her about the scholarship?

WILL. I didn't tell her a thing except that you were still around the farm.

WHERE THE BUFFALO ROAM

EM. Well, for heaven's sake, you're dumb. You're the dumbest man I've ever met. What with you so dumb and Joanna so dumb, I can't think why your mother didn't drown you. Does Joanna think we're all so desperate? Didn't you tell her Effie was doing well at school?

WILL. No. She said she supposed Effie was growing up wild among all the cowboys.

EM. The idea! Effie! But surely, Will, you knew she'd find out?

TED. Aw, Dad, Mum's right. It was a darned silly thing to kid her along.

WILL (*goaded*). How was I to know she'd come over here and see for herself? Gosh! She made the whole thing sound so dreary I didn't think anyone would ever want to come near the place.

EM. But you said she was romantic.

WILL. I reckon I did, but I didn't think she was as goldarned romantic as all that.

TED. Well, she'll be here soon and see for herself.

[*He goes to case and puts his books away on the shelves.*]

EM. Oh, dear! (*She looks around the room hopelessly. Suddenly excited.*) I know. She *shall* see. We won't disappoint her. We'll act for all we're worth. We'll change this place. Let's make it dreary and depressing. Let's pretend to be just what she thinks we are.

WILL. We couldn't, Em.

EM. Why not? It won't take long. It'll be great fun.

WILL. We couldn't keep it up.

TED. She'd guess we were kidding.

EM. Not if we act properly.

TED. It's all very well for you. You can act, but Dad and I never even got a part in a crowd.

EM. Never mind. Just you follow my lead and we'll be the greatest success in years. All you want is confidence. Quick now!

[*She takes tulips towards kitchen.*]

WHERE THE BUFFALO ROAM

WILL. Where are you going?

EM. To hide these under the sink. Joanna mustn't see flowers around. They're far too cheerful. We'll have to hurry like mad. Here, Ted, you take these.

[She thrusts tulips at him.]

TED. Gee, Mum, you're crazy!

EM. No more crazy than your father and your Aunt Joanna. Come on now, hurry! We'll have to work out a plan. Where's Effie?

TED. She walked over to MacGregor's to do her algebra with Lily.

EM. She's got to forget her algebra. That's too quiet. *(Thinks for a moment.)* She's got to be a — a cowgirl.

WILL. Em!

EM. Remember what Joanna said now. She's going to be the wildest cowgirl this side of the Rockies. We've all got to be things. Will, you go and take your collar off. Put on your oldest coat and your slippers. You're on relief. See? You haven't any self respect whatever.

WILL. I've enough left not to help in this crazy plan.

EM. Now, Will, you got us into this mess.

WILL *(hopefully)*. But suppose Joanna likes it.

EM. She won't. She thinks she will, but she won't. After we're through she'll be only too glad to find we're normal people; then the tulips can come back.

TED. It is rather a lark. Come on, Dad!

WILL. All right, but don't say I didn't warn you.

[He goes reluctantly upstairs.]

TED. What shall I be, Mum?

EM. Oh dear, you're a problem. I know, you're sullen, see? You want to go to college but can't.

TED. Can't I tell her about the scholarship?

EM. Of course not. You can tell her later. It will be a pleasant surprise. No, you can't go to college. You have to work on the farm, see?

TED. Um-m!

WHERE THE BUFFALO ROAM

EM. You've got to act for all you're worth. Pretend you're grumpy and depressed.

TED. Gee, Mum! You know I can't act. It's goofy!

EM. You mope around with mud on your boots and — you keep getting into corners and reading Shakespeare.

TED. That's better. That's sort of fun.

EM. If you're reading Shakespeare all the time no one will notice how goofy your acting is. But you'd better cover up that bookshelf. Jo will wonder how we can afford so many books.

TED. What about the Shakespeare I'm supposed to be reading in odd corners?

EM. Hide it in the window seat, then you can seem to be taking it out surreptitiously. (*Ted hides it. Em looks in window seat and takes out a piece of dark material.*)

Cover the bookcase with this. (*Excitedly.*) Why, if there aren't those old curtains we took down, when we first had the farm!

[*She jumps up on window seat and hurriedly begins unhooking the bright curtains and putting up the old ones. In her exuberance she lapses once more into "Home on the Range." Ted takes out the tulips and returns.*]

EM. Take your tie off, Ted, and rumple your hair a bit. Mousle your collar. That's fine!

[*Em returns to her curtain hanging as Effie enters and sees her mother with curtains clutched to her bosom.*]

EFFIE. Goodness, what are you doing, Mum?

EM. Getting ready for your Aunt Joanna.

EFFIE. But you got ready yesterday.

TED. Well, now she's getting ready some more.

EM. We're preparing a big surprise for your aunt,

Effie. She thinks we're very poor.

EFFIE. Well, we're not.

TED. No, but she's coming all the way out here because she thinks we are. She wants to study the dismal condition of the prairie provinces at first hand, see, kid?

[*He tugs her pigtails.*]

WHERE THE BUFFALO ROAM

EFFIE. Oh, how lovely! Can we dress up?

EM. Yes. She thinks you're a wild cowgirl.

EFFIE (*squealing*). Oh, what fun! Can I be, Mum?
I've got my overalls and hat.

TED. She thinks you shoot buffalo.

EFFIE. Oh, what fun! It's like charades. (*She rushes upstairs just as Will is coming down. He is seedily dressed, his hair neglected, a dirty shirt tucked in a very dirty pair of pants.*) Is Dad in this, too? Oh, Dad, you look lovely.

[*She gives him a violent hug and rushes on upstairs.*]

WILL. That child gets more like her mother every day.

EM (*ignoring this remark*). Oh, Will, you look lovely.

[*Em has by now hung her curtains and hidden the bright curtains and cushions in the window seat.*]

TED. Dad, those pants smell. Last time you wore them you cleaned out the byre.

EM. That's what Joanna wants. That shirt's just right, too. Now I must get ready. She thinks I'm crazy, eh?

WILL. Well, not quite, but nearly.

EM. All right!

[*Effie comes racing downstairs, a ten-gallon hat over one eye, her overalls over her arm.*]

EFFIE. Will these do?

EM. Fine! Put them on quick.

[*Effie dumps her things on chair downstage left and proceeds to dress on stage, taking off her sweater and kilt, and revealing the fact that her protection against the icy blasts of winter is a woolly bodice and a pair of navy bloomers.*]

WILL. My goodness! Hasn't the child any sense of decency?

EFFIE (*capering madly about in her underthings*). I'm a wild cowgirl! Yah!

[*She emits a yell, curdling enough to scare a whole herd of buffalo, and proceeds to step into her overalls.*]

WHERE THE BUFFALO ROAM

EM. Oh, dear, I can hear the sleigh, and we're not nearly ready.

TED. What shall we do about Pete?

EM. I'd forgotten Pete.

WILL (*helpfully*). She expects all Indians to be fierce.

EM. That's it. While Joanna is upstairs, you two explain everything clearly to Pete.

WILL. Right this minute I don't think I could explain anything clearly to anyone.

EM. Never mind. You'll manage fine. Make Pete put on his feathers. Tell him to be as fierce as — as the devil.

[*Em exits triumphantly up the stairs. Effie, now fully clad, thrusts her skirt and sweater into the window seat and capers, yelling.*]

TED. Stop that racket. You should be out shooting buffalo.

EFFIE. Not in this weather.

TED. Aunt Jo won't know what weather you shoot buffalo in. I don't suppose she'd know a buffalo if she saw one. Go along!

EFFIE (*a trifle damped*). But it's awfully cold outside.

TED. Hide in the kitchen and pretend, silly!

[*He pushes her out and closes the door. The sound of a sleigh stopping is heard and almost immediately Joanna's voice and Pete's. Joanna's accent is English, her voice firm, as if all the world were a school and she taught it higher mathematics.*]

JOANNA (*offstage*). Is this the place? How very typical! (*There is a sound of grunts from Pete. Joanna's head is seen bobbing past the window. Her head wears a round, brown felt English hat. A little behind comes Pete, staggering with the baggage. His course wavers slightly.*) It's very cold, isn't it?

[*More grunts from Pete. As he passes the window he looks in and grins broadly.*]

TED (*in a hushed voice*). Here she is.

WHERE THE BUFFALO ROAM

WILL (*gloomily*). Pete's tight. Now Heaven help us.
Where's your mother?

EM (*her voice is heard at the top of the stairs*). Is that them?

TED. Yes. Come on, Mother.

EM. I'll be right down.

[*There is a knocking and bumping at the front door and the sound of its opening. Pete's voice is heard: "Door on your left, ma'am." He drops a grip. "Hell!" Joanna's voice is heard in sympathy. "Oh, let me help you. Did you hurt yourself?" Grunts from Pete, and Joanna's voice again. "That's splendid!" The door downstage left opens and Joanna appears, followed by Pete with the baggage.*

JOANNA. Will, after all these years! But how you've changed! You poor fellow! Is it as bad as that? (*She holds him away and looks at him.*) These dreadful prairies! (*Turning to Ted, who is standing sheepishly by.*) And this is Ted, I suppose. What a fine, manly boy! (*She pats him on the shoulder. Ted wriggles.*) You're a brave lad, my dear. I've heard all about you. I know how much you'd love to go to college. (*She pats him again.*) Never mind, we'll soon set that right. I have plans. Where's Em?

EM (*mournfully, from the top of the stairs*). Here I am! (*They all stand looking in her direction. There is an amazed hush. She descends slowly, her hand on the stair-rail. Her face is white and drawn, her curly hair brushed flatly back, and fixed in a bleak knot. Her skirt is a miracle of non-description, and so are her feet. She is wrapped in a dark shawl. Speaks in a far-away voice.*) It's very cold. Did someone call? (*She looks vaguely around.*) Is there anyone here?

TED (*amazed*). Mum!

[*Will nudges him to be quiet. Pete is still standing just inside the door, all cluttered up with baggage, his hand on the back of his head, his jaw dropped in wonder. Joanna*

WHERE THE BUFFALO ROAM

gives a little cry as Em reaches the foot of the stairs. Joanna runs forward.

JOANNA. Em, you poor darling, what is the matter?

EM (*continuing to talk in a high monotonous voice*).

There's nothing the matter. Why should there be?

Who are you?

JOANNA. I'm Joanna. Will's sister. Come all the way from England to see you. Don't you remember me?

EM. Will's sister? Has he a sister? I thought she died.

Everyone dies. (*Confidentially.*) It's the wind, the prairie wind. It blows and it blows and never stops. Listen!

[*Em holds up her hand commandingly. They all listen instinctively. There is no sound.*]

JOANNA. I don't hear anything. Poor girl, the loneliness has been getting on her nerves. (*Reproachfully, to Will.*) You didn't tell me she was as bad as this. Why didn't you bring her home, Will?

WILL (*producing his pipe as a refuge and fumbling in his pocket for matches*). She's not usually as bad as this.

I — er —

TED. It's the long winter, Aunt Jo, and your coming.

JOANNA. My coming?

TED. Yes, the excitement and all that.

[*Will strikes a match. Em, seeing this and feeling that smoking is not in keeping with the general depression, lets out a little scream.*]

EM (*fiercely*). Don't smoke! (*Will stops amazed. She looks at him earnestly.*) Don't smoke, I say. I can't bear the smell of smoke.

WILL. But, Em!

EM (*sepulchrally, to Joanna*). We had a fire once. All our crops were burnt. The wind blew and the fire raged, and in the morning our fields were black. All our year's work ruined.

[*She looks helplessly at Joanna, whose ready imagination is obviously catching fire, too.*]

WHERE THE BUFFALO ROAM

JOANNA. Everything gone?

EM. Everything!

WILL. Everything!

JOANNA (*in a hushed voice*). How dreadful!

[*Ted sinks moodily on to the window seat, after having produced his Shakespeare as surreptitiously as possible. Pete is trying to back through the door.*]

WILL. Pete, take these grips upstairs to Miss Myers' room. Where is she sleeping, Em?

EM. Who?

WILL (*impatiently*). Joanna.

EM (*starting a little and turning gracefully to Joanna*).

Oh, of course, you must forgive me. I am so sorry. My head hurts so. (*Confidentially.*) It's the prairie wind. It blows and blows and blows.

JOANNA. Why don't you go and lie down?

EM. No, it's all right. I can bear it. It's always like this. Let me show you your room. Pete, bring the grips.

[*They go upstairs, Pete following.*]

JOANNA (*her voice is heard, getting fainter*). I'll give you some aspirin. That will do your head good. Now I'm here, you can rest. I'm here to help you get well, you know.

TED. Cripes!

WILL (*hastily pulling out his pipe and lighting it*). I didn't know your mother had it in her.

TED. Don't you make any mistake. Old what's-his-name didn't make her best actress for nothing. But how long is she going to keep it up?

WILL. That's what worries me. Confound it, don't you think she'll ever let me smoke?

TED. I don't suppose so. Mother never does anything by halves. If you ask me, she's as bad as Aunt Joanna.

[*Pete descends.*]

PETE. What the hell's the matter with the missus?

WILL. Nothing.

WHERE THE BUFFALO ROAM

PETE. Nothing? I've never seen a woman act so plumb crazy. What's she got those clothes on for?

TED. It's a joke.

PETE (*indignantly*). A fine sort of a joke, scaring the wits out of me without any warning and treating Miss Joanna as if she wasn't.

TED. Now see here, Pete, you've got to help us.

PETE. No, siree. You don't get me acting like a crazy man. No, sir. I'm quitting. I'm quitting this house right away.

WILL. No, Pete, you're not. You're tight.

PETE. I sure am not tight.

WILL. Well, you're near enough to do things you'll regret tomorrow. (*They take his arm and lead him to chair downstage right. He sits bewildered.*) Now listen to me. If you do what we ask you, and do it properly, you shall have a bottle of rye all to yourself.

PETE. When?

WILL. Tomorrow.

PETE. Well, shoot! But no crazy stuff, mind! You don't get Indian Pete going round in an old skirt and shawl. No, sir! I'm a Blackfoot Indian, I am, and fierce at that.

WILL. That's it!

PETE. That's what?

WILL. That's what we want you to be, a fierce Blackfoot Indian.

PETE. Why, in heaven's name?

TED. It's Aunt Joanna.

WILL. Pull yourself together, Pete, and listen carefully. Miss Myers has come out here because she thinks we're surrounded by Indians and buffalo, and we can't disappoint her.

PETE (*highly amused*). And all you've got are me and some scrawny hens!

WILL. Well, you've got to be as fierce as ten Indians.

PETE (*getting up*). All right. I'll show her. I'll show

WHERE THE BUFFALO ROAM

her what a Blackfoot Indian's like. A bottle of rye to-morrow, mind!

WILL. Yes, yes! Now hurry!

PETE. Could I have something on account now?

WILL. No. You're tight enough.

PETE. No, sir. I'm not fierce enough, not nearly, not deep down inside. Why, I feel gentle.

WILL. All right! Ted, get the bottle.

[Ted goes to cupboard and gets out rye. Pete takes a long swig.]

PETE. That's better. Now I'm fine! Where did you put my clothes?

TED. What clothes?

PETE. My clothes, of course. My Blackfoot Indian clothes. *(Advancing threateningly.)* They didn't get burnt in the fire the missus was gabbing about, did they?

WILL *(hurriedly)*. No, they were put in the shed, behind the kitchen. Now, hurry, Pete.

PETE. I'll hurry. Yes, sir, I'll hurry.

WILL. Don't you forget it's only a joke, Pete, will you?

PETE. No, I won't forget — a joke!

[He goes into the kitchen, chuckling fiercely.]

WILL. I'm worried. When Pete's half tight you never know what he'll do.

TED. Don't you worry, Dad. Aunt Jo will love it.

WILL. Well, I'll be glad when it's all over and we can settle down to normal lives again.

[Effie's head appears around kitchen door.]

EFFIE. Say, can't I come in yet?

TED. No, you stay there. She hasn't asked about you yet. She'll be down in a minute. Wait till you hear her mention buffalo and then yell like mad.

EFFIE *(coming into room)*. Will I do?

TED. Swell! You look kinda clean, though.

EFFIE. I can soon make myself dirty.

[She seizes ashes from stove and rubs them over her face with shocking results.]

WHERE THE BUFFALO ROAM

TED. Here, that's too much. We don't want to overdo things. (*He seizes Effie's pigtail and wipes her face with it.*) There! That's better. Now scram! Here they come. (*He pushes her out. Will groans and knocks out his pipe.*) Cheer up, Dad. Do your stuff. You're not acting enough. Be weak, hopeless, see? Like Mother said.

WILL (*dismally*). I'm that, all right.

[*Joanna and Em appear on the stairs, Joanna leading Em solicitously. Jo's hat is off. Her hair is gray and spiky. She leads Em to chair downstage right.*]

JOANNA. There, my dear, you sit there and rest your poor head. I think it's dreadful that they have allowed you to get into such a state.

[*She looks fiercely at Will.*]

WILL. It's not our fault, I tell you. It's the drought. (*He sinks into chair at table, head in hands.*) I can't go on like this. I can't. I can't. (*Pause. With a flash of inspiration.*) Canada, they say, is a land of tomorrow, and tomorrow never comes.

TED (*sinking into chair opposite his father*). Just year after year, drudgery, drudgery! No money for clothes, no money for schooling.

[*Jo looks very much impressed. Em takes a hasty look at the effect her family is producing and sinks back in chair, eyes closed.*]

JOANNA. You're on relief, I suppose.

WILL (*head in hands*). Yes, on relief. Here am I at fifty, broken, useless, and look at Em there, all her beauty faded.

JOANNA (*looking regretfully at Em*). She *was* pretty.

[*Em moans.*]

WILL. And soon Ted will be like me, year after year sticking around this farm, no college, no chance to make good.

[*Ted walks gloomily over to window.*]

JOANNA. Oh, it's too awful! But can't you sell?

WILL. No one will buy. We've tried.

WHERE THE BUFFALO ROAM

TED. Oh yes, we've tried.

WILL. Who'd buy this barren waste? Soil blowing away year after year? No money for trees for field shelter! No money to move!

EM (*in a hollow tone*). The wind blows and blows and blows! (*Her voice rises.*) . . . and blows and blows!

WILL (*feeling that his wife is overdoing things*). Em!

JOANNA. Don't speak to her like that, Will. Don't you realize she's given the best years of her life to serve you here? Toiling day and night, cooking, scrubbing, washing, never still, never idle, her first thought always for the comfort of her husband and children, her beauty going, her body emaciated, her nerves torn to shreds? (*Em has sat up and is regarding Jo with admiration.*) And here you scold her when she at last gives way to her bottled-up feelings! (*She sits resolutely in chair by table opposite Will.*) Now listen to me. I've been making plans. Ever since I decided to come I've been thinking hard.

WILL (*hastily*). But, Joanna, not now! You must be hungry. Em, don't you think we could find a little lunch for Joanna? She's come a long way, you know.

EM (*weakly*). There are some apples and a little stew.

JOANNA (*firmly*). Not yet! Talk first, lunch after. You'll all have much more appetite when you've heard what I've got to say. I can retire any time now and I've got a pension. Also I told you when I wrote, Will, that Aunt Myra left me a small legacy, not much but enough to help. Now in England I'm a useless old woman with my life over, but here a new life is just beginning. With my money we can build up the farm, we can plant trees, we can hire more men.

EM. More scrubbing, more cooking!

JOANNA. No, I'll help you. I'm strong as a horse. With two of us around the house, Em, it'll be so cheerful, working, singing together.

WHERE THE BUFFALO ROAM

WILL (*gloomily*). It'll never do.

[*Ted groans.*]

JOANNA (*turning to Ted*). And you, poor boy, eating your heart out for college. I'll help you too. Cheer up. Things are never as black as they seem. I'll coach you. All this year we'll work together. In the long summer evenings when the farm work is over we'll work at your mathematics and Latin and Shakespeare, and then I'll help pay for you to go to college in the autumn.

TED (*goaded beyond endurance*). Gee, no!

JOANNA. Now don't be proud, dear. Or do you think maybe I can't help you. I've prepared girls for college, you know, for twenty years, but of course, things may be harder here. I'm afraid my Latin's a little rusty. Still, we'll try anyway, won't we?

TED. I guess so.

JOANNA. That's lovely. And, Will, you will feel better when we've got things on their feet. Everything will be more cheerful when Em feels better. We'll get you some more clothes, Em, nice bright clothes. I've got another coat and skirt you can borrow till we get some made. (*Em looks unhappy. Joanna rises briskly.*) Then that's all settled, except for Effie. Where is Effie? I've been looking forward to seeing her.

TED. Out shooting buffalo.

JOANNA. That child? Heavens! Are there many buffalo here?

TED. Yes. They eat all our crops.

JOANNA. But can't you fence them in?

TED. They jump all the fences.

EM. We can't do anything with Effie, she's so wild.

[*Effie, from the kitchen, emits a series of bloodcurdling yells and bursts into the room.*]

EFFIE. Where's Aunt Joanna? (*She rushes up to her and gives her a violent shake of the hand.*) Hello, Aunt Jo, how're things?

WHERE THE BUFFALO ROAM

JOANNA. Very well, thank you, my dear. What a remarkable outfit!

[*She looks at Effie with admiration.*]

EFFIE (*preening herself*). Don't you like it? (*Prancing around.*) I wear it to shoot buffalo.

JOANNA (*enviously*). It's lovely.

EFFIE. I'm glad you like it. I knew you would. They all think it's awful. You're a dear.

[*Gives Joanna a terrific hug.*]

WILL. Effie!

EM. There's no doing anything with her. And she's so slovenly and untidy.

[*She leans back exhausted again.*]

JOANNA. I think her dress is most suitable. You're going to be very pretty one day, my dear.

EFFIE (*yelling*). Yah! Who cares for looks? (*She turns a series of cartwheels across the room.*) Bet you can't do that!

[*She repeats the experiment.*]

JOANNA. They're pretty good. I can't do them now, but I used to be able to.

EFFIE (*amazed*). You did?

JOANNA. Oh, yes, in my young days I used to be a tomboy, just like you. (*Effie looks a little deflated.*) I beat Will at climbing trees, didn't I, Will?

WILL. You did.

JOANNA. I beat all the boys in the neighborhood. They were a poor lot, though.

EFFIE. I think boys are sissie, don't you?

JOANNA. Yes, I do.

EFFIE. Bet you can't ride, though.

JOANNA. Oh, yes, I can.

EFFIE. Side saddle?

JOANNA. Good gracious, no! Bareback, of course. I used to hang on with my knees and wave my arms in the air and pretend I was an Indian.

WHERE THE BUFFALO ROAM

EFFIE (*regarding her dubiously*). But it was quite a gentle horse, I expect.

JOANNA. Gentle nothing! Fiercest horse on the farm. They gave him to me because no one else would ride him. He threw everyone he could.

EFFIE (*at a loss*). Oh! (*There is a moment's pause. Effie with fresh inspiration.*) Then maybe you can't shoot.

JOANNA (*sadly*). No, I can't shoot. I'd love to learn, though. Will you teach me?

EM (*nervously*). Effie's got to be made to go to school. I don't hold with her playing with guns. She's wild enough.

JOANNA. No. Effie shan't go to school. She shall stay around and help on the farm, and teach me to shoot buffalo.

EFFIE (*who doesn't like the idea at all*). I guess I've got to go to school some time.

EM. Of course she has, Joanna. And you a schoolmistress, too. I thought you were going to help us.

TED (*returning to his Shakespeare*). It's hopeless.

JOANNA (*looking around defiantly*). I think — I think school-teaching is all rot.

WILL. Jo!

JOANNA. Yes, I do. I was suppressed in my youth, and look at the result! We'll make something better of Effie. It will do Em good to have Effie around.

EFFIE (*sincerely*). I hate washing up and baking.

JOANNA. Never mind. After you've helped your mother and me you can come and teach me to shoot buffalo. We'll have such grand times together. I might almost climb trees again.

EFFIE. There aren't any trees.

JOANNA. Oh, no, I forgot.

EM. The wind blows and blows across the prairie.

JOANNA (*hastily*). Never mind! Maybe I could get back

WHERE THE BUFFALO ROAM

to turning cartwheels. (*To Effie.*) Could I wear clothes like those, do you think?

WILL. You could not.

JOANNA. But I could. I'll get some. I must learn to do all that you people do. I want to be a real Canadian. (*She sees the guns on the wall.*) Can I borrow a gun? [*She goes to the wall.*]

WILL. Don't touch them.

JOANNA. All right. But lend me one, Will. I'll be ever so careful.

WILL. We'll see.

JOANNA. Why do you have so many?

WILL. We go hunting in the fall.

JOANNA (*eagerly*). All of you?

WILL. No. Ted, and Pete, and I.

JOANNA (*indicating moose over fireplace*). Did you shoot that big thing?

WILL. No. Pete did.

JOANNA (*in awe*). How brave! I like Pete. He's nice. He's the first Indian I've ever lived with. They'll be so thrilled when I write home and tell them.

TED. He's not so nice. He can be dreadfully savage.

EM. I'm terrified of him.

EFFIE. Especially at the full moon.

JOANNA. Why at the full moon?

WILL. He's fiercer then.

TED. There's no knowing what he'll do.

JOANNA. But why don't you get rid of him?

EM. We can't afford to.

TED. He works without pay.

WILL. He's invaluable.

JOANNA. But you could be strict with him, couldn't you?

TED. We've tried, but he gets fiercer.

JOANNA. Well, why don't you lock him up during the full moon?

EM. He gets out, howling like a werewolf. Sometimes I

WHERE THE BUFFALO ROAM

think he's put a spell on us all. (*Ominously.*) The evil eye.

JOANNA. How terrible! I've read about all these things in Canada, but I'd no idea they were quite so bad.

TED. They're often much worse.

EM. Much worse.

JOANNA. Well, just you leave things with me. I'll deal with Pete. Where is he?

EM. He should be getting lunch.

WILL. But he won't, the lazy skunk.

JOANNA. We'll soon see about that.

TED. He's in the woodshed.

JOANNA. I'll fetch him.

EM. No, Joanna.

JOANNA. But certainly I will. If we're ever going to get things straight around here we mustn't stand any nonsense. Come on, Effie! Come and show me where Pete is.

EM (*springing up*). No, Joanna, don't be silly.

JOANNA. That's better. Why, you sound more cheerful already. But you stay where you are and rest. Come on, Effie!

[*Effie follows her out reluctantly.*]

WILL. This has got to stop. We'd better tell her, or heaven knows what she'll get up to.

EM. No. It's fun. We'll see it through. I'm beginning to feel as though I really am crazy. Don't you think I'm doing well?

WILL. Far too well.

EM. The wind blows and blows.

TED. I think you overdo that a bit, Mum.

EM (*anxiously*). Do you think so? Joanna seemed to like it.

WILL. Let's tell her the truth.

TED. No. She's enjoying it. I rather like the old girl.

WILL. But we can't have her going around expecting to be killed by Pete and keeping Effie out of school and giving Em aspirin.

WHERE THE BUFFALO ROAM

TED (*with a chuckle*). And turning cartwheels.

WILL. It's Pete I'm afraid of.

EFFIE (*entering gleefully*). Pete's all dressed up and he's as tight as an owl and acting awful mad. Oh, dear!

[*She subsides into a chair in a paroxysm of delight. Joanna backs hurriedly into the room carrying a tray, closely followed by Pete in full regalia brandishing a tomahawk.*]

JOANNA. How dare you! Put that down!

[*She backs into the table and hastily sets down the tray.*]

EM. Pete!

WILL. Pete, stop fooling!

PETE. I ain't fooling. This is serious. She told me to help her lay the lunch, me a pure-blooded Blackfoot Indian.

JOANNA (*edging around the table but speaking firmly*). But you're supposed to lay the lunch.

PETE (*following her around the table and running his finger along the edge of his tomahawk*). Supposed, am I? Who do you think I take orders from around here? Nobody! (*Joanna is gradually forced around the table to the wall downstage left.*) No Indian takes orders from any white folk around here. Do you hear?

[*He waves the tomahawk in her face.*]

JOANNA (*anxiously*). Keep away!

PETE. Why should I keep away? You came here wanting excitement. I'll show you.

[*He sways uncertainly.*]

WILL. Pete, get out of here at once. You're drunk.

PETE. Oh, yes. I'm drunk. You don't think the old girl here was the only thing I fetched from the station, do you?

TED. Pete, don't be a fool.

EFFIE. O-oh, Pete, you're doing fine. Go on.

EM. Effie, be quiet! Pete's serious.

[*Pete raises his tomahawk and goes for Joanna.*]

PETE. I'll soon finish you.

WHERE THE BUFFALO ROAM

TED. Pete!

JOANNA. Keep back. (*They all make towards Pete, but Joanna is quicker. She seizes the gun from the wall and points it at Pete.*) Keep back, or I'll shoot you.

[*Her voice is firm but her hand wavers a little. Pete backs slowly, then noticing the wavering hand gains courage.*]

PETE. Aw, who's afraid?

[*Pete takes a step forward and Joanna fires. Pete gives one bloodcurdling yell and bolts through the kitchen door. There is a moment's amazed silence. Joanna stands with the gun still wavering uncertainly in her hands.*]

JOANNA (*in an awestruck voice*). It went off. (*Triumphantly.*) I shot him. (*Ruefully, as Pete is heard muttering in the kitchen.*) But I'm awfully afraid I missed him.

[*She looks sadly at the gun.*]

EFFIE (*consolingly*). Never mind, you did pretty well for the first time, Aunt Jo.

JOANNA. It wasn't so bad, was it? (*Resolutely.*) I'll go and finish him.

[*She makes off towards the kitchen.*]

WILL } (*together*). No, you don't!
TED }

[*They spring at her and Will takes the gun.*]

WILL. You stay right here and keep quiet. I'll go and see whether Pete's all right. I hope to heaven you haven't shot him.

JOANNA. I hope I have. You're not firm enough with him, Will. It's what I told you.

WILL. Come on, Ted!

[*They go out.*]

EM. Jo, are you all right?

JOANNA (*briskly*). Of course I'm all right. It was most exciting. (*She sees the lunch tray.*) Still, he ought to have got lunch. Come on, Effie, all this gun play has made me hungry. (*She starts to set table, picking up*

WHERE THE BUFFALO ROAM

Ted's Shakespeare to make room.) Poor Ted! Studying against such fearful odds. Where does he keep this? I suppose he's afraid someone will take it from him, poor boy! (*Joanna opens the window seat to put the book away and gives a squeal of delight.*) Em!

EM (*wearily*). What is it now?

JOANNA (*pulling out the bright curtains*). Look what's in here! Oh, how lovely! Just what this room needs. (*Reproachfully.*) Why didn't you *use* them, Em? (*She takes them out in armfuls.*) Em, how you've let this life get you down! Never mind, we'll soon have them up. I hope they fit.

[*She jumps up on window seat and starts changing curtains.*]

EM (*suddenly determined*). Joanna, let me explain.

JOANNA. There's no need to explain, dear. I'd have got as indifferent myself if I'd led your life.

[*The door bursts open and Ted and Will come in.*]

TED. Pete's worse and worse. He's got a notion that Aunt Jo's a wonderful woman and says he must kiss her hand as homage from his tribe.

EM. Well, he can't.

WILL. We must keep him out till he's sober.

JOANNA. Certainly not. He must apologize. He might have killed me. You haven't been strict enough with him, Will.

[*Pete rushes in, looks wildly around for Joanna, sees her standing militant on the window seat, clutching curtains to her bosom, and falls on his knees where he is, his feathers low to the ground.*]

PETE. Ma'am! Miss Joanna!

JOANNA. Well?

PETE. I'm that sorry for scaring you.

JOANNA (*indignantly*). You didn't scare me. Get up!

PETE (*getting up and running forward, falling on his knees at her feet, seizing her hand and kissing it exuberantly*).

Gee, ma'am, you're wonderful. I was crazy, plumb

WHERE THE BUFFALO ROAM

crazy. There's not another woman would have had the courage to stand up to a pure-blooded Blackfoot Indian the way you done. I swear, ma'am, I wouldn't hurt a hair of your head.

JOANNA (*patting him maternally on his feathers*). There, there, get up, that's all right, but don't you ever do it again.

PETE. No, *ma'am!*

JOANNA. And run along now and take those silly feathers off. I expect they make you fierce just to be in them. (*She waves him majestically away. Pete rises and backs and bows and exits rapidly. Joanna clutches curtains and looks around triumphantly at the amazed and silent family.*) Oh, what lovely times we're going to have!

Curtain

-

BAYOU HARLEQUINADE

By

BETTY SMITH & CLEMON WHITE

Copyright, 1940, by Samuel French.

CAST

COLUMBINE.

GELSOMINO.

HARLEQUIN.

THE TIME: only a few years ago.

THE PLACE: you would never find, no matter how hard you looked for it. However, it closely resembles a little village in Southern Louisiana.

THE SCENE: resembles a little house beside Teche Bayou near the town of Charenton in the parish of Saint Mary.

BAYOU HARLEQUINADE

The setting is the living room of Columbine and Gelsomino's little house. They live in the grand manner in the midst of rustic solitude. There are two long French windows upstage. A small rosewood spinet piano stands between them. The windows open inward and are used as doors to the terrace which gives on to the walled garden. The windows have pointed tops and are curtained in delicate-colored, handwoven materials looped back graciously to permit the afternoon sun to stand awhile at the base of each window. The color of the curtains is the shade known as Alice Blue and matches Columbine's bows. Through the windows may be seen a little of the purple-rosy-blue sunset sky which humbly serves as a background for the moss-hung live oaks, eternal elms and the still-white magnolias of the lowland country. There is a five-branched candelabrum on the piano. It holds slender white candles. There is a door in the center of the right wall which leads to the kitchen where Columbine bakes her little pink cakes. A door opposite, in the left wall, leads to the sleeping room.

The furniture is well preserved, of an old French design. There is a small table downstage to right of center covered with a flowing yellow scarf. On it stands a white vase with a narrow neck, holding magnolias. To left of table is an armchair upholstered in some rose-colored material. Downstage of the left door, parallel to the wall, is an old Empire sofa upholstered in apple green. There is another armchair upholstered in faded lavender standing upstage of the right door. Near this is a small round table on which stands a man's black hat upside down. There is a flowing black satin tie made up into a bow around the neck of the vase. Gelsomino's violin is lying on the floor.

At rise Gelsomino storms into the room from door, left.

BAYOU HARLEQUINADE

He has been looking all over for his violin and is fuming because he cannot find it.

GELSOMINO. Columbine! Columbine! Where is my violin?

COLUMBINE (off). Look around, oh 'Mino.* You'll find your violin.

GELSOMINO (*stumbles over his violin on the floor. Un-thinkingly in his rage, he kicks it across the room. Instantly, he perceives it is his violin. He picks it up tenderly. He plucks a string. A doleful "twang" results*). Bah!

COLUMBINE (*enters, carrying a small plate on which is a little heart-shaped cookie covered with pink icing. A long-stemmed pink rose lies next to the cookie*). Ah! (*Crosses to table where she sets down the plate.*)

What a fellow you are to fret and fume.

Looking all over for your violin,

And all the while you hold it in your hand!

GELSOMINO (*still holding the violin, raises both arms to heaven in a theatrical gesture of despair. He places the violin on the piano. With his hand to his heart, he bows ironically*). Will madame, my wife, be so kind

As to tell me where my tie is?

COLUMBINE (*clapping her hands in delight at what she considers a game*). Yes. She'll tell you.

GELSOMINO (*clutching his brow in controlled but frantic despair*). Where?

COLUMBINE. There! (*She points to the vase. Fuming with impatience, Gelsomino unties the tie.*)

The vase does look like a neck, don't you think it does? How naked it looks without your tie! Don't you think We could leave it there when you don't need it? (*As he ties the bow around his neck.*) Where are you going?

GELSOMINO. Today's the day I counted aside to visit the curate. It's the time of the month when our tithes should be delivered.

* Pronounced as if spelled Mine-O.

BAYOU HARLEQUINADE

COLUMBINE. But 'Mino, you are wearing your best blouse.

GELSOMINO. Nag! Nag! Nag! (*Pause.*) Would you have me see His Reverence in my field blouse?

COLUMBINE. It has been but a week since last you took our tithes.

GELSOMINO. To be tardy, is to show a reluctant spirit.

COLUMBINE. But to be over-anxious is to show something more than gratitude to heaven.

GELSOMINO. Gifts should come when the urge is fresh.

COLUMBINE. And the curate's sister is waiting.

GELSOMINO. Now don't be womanish, my dear.

COLUMBINE (*pleadingly*). Don't leave me all alone today.

GELSOMINO. Columbine, you try my patience.

COLUMBINE. If I must be alone so much, will you not buy me a white kitten with a pink bow?

GELSOMINO (*shocked*). To take my place?

COLUMBINE. To run up and down the piano keys
And make sudden queer music in the room
To frighten the silence away.

[*She brushes her hand across the piano keys to illustrate.*]

GELSOMINO. Now, Columbine, you know you had a kitten once.

You know the terrible thing that happened to it.

COLUMBINE. Yes, 'Mino. (*She hangs her head.*) It grew up into a cat.

GELSOMINO. Exactly!

COLUMBINE. If I could have another chance, I'd—I'd be more careful.

GELSOMINO. No matter how careful you were, it would still grow into a cat. (*Pause.*) Like children grow up into men and women. (*Pause.*) And that, Columbine, is what is wrong with you.

COLUMBINE. I'll . . . I'll try to do better. Now that you have explained that that is the destiny of a kitten, I shall not cry when it changes into a cat.

GELSOMINO. No! No! I mean you persist in having the heart of a child.

BAYOU HARLEQUINADE

COLUMBINE (*eagerly*). It's not my heart. It's my shoes.

(*She points her toe.*) I'll get a pair with high heels to-morrow and then I'll be quite grown-up.

GELSOMINO. There was a time when such childish prattle delighted me. But now . . . (*Pause.*) Where is my hat?

[*He is looking right at it.*]

COLUMBINE (*anguished*). Oh, don't you see *anything*?

GELSOMINO. Ah!

[*Picks it up with his two hands, and bending his head, he places it on carefully in a straight line parallel with his eyebrows. He stands there with an astonished look on his face.*]

COLUMBINE. What is wrong?

[*Gingerly, with both hands, he lifts hat straight in the air off his head. A large magnolia blossom may be seen setting on top of his head.*]

GELSOMINO (*afraid*). Look quickly and tell me.

COLUMBINE. It's just a flower I put in your hat to make it smell nice.

GELSOMINO (*bitterly*). The curate's sister wouldn't do a foolish thing like that.

[*He throws the flower to the floor and sets the hat on the piano, upside down.*]

COLUMBINE. I do not like the curate's sister.

GELSOMINO. She is a woman. Not a dreamy child like you.

COLUMBINE. You said the same last year of the sister of Pierre LeBlanc, that she, too, was a woman.

GELSOMINO. The curate's sister is different.

COLUMBINE. She is too kind to you.

GELSOMINO. Can I help it that the sister of His Reverence is kind? Should I say . . . do not look at me. It displeases my wife.

COLUMBINE. You should say . . . (*A mocking bird in*

BAYOU HARLEQUINADE

the garden whistles a few notes.) Oh, dear! I haven't fed the mocking birds today. (*She breaks off a piece of the cookie and scatters the crumbs outside the French window.*) There, dear birds.

GELSOMINO (*disgusted*). Birds! (*He undoes the knot of his sash while she feeds the birds.*) Here!

COLUMBINE (*inquiringly*). Dear?

GELSOMINO. Help me wind my sash tighter. I think it makes me look thinner. (*Hastily.*) Not that I'm getting fat, of course.

[*She takes one end of the sash and, holding it, walks backwards away from him. He stands in the same place, revolving slowly as the sash unwinds. This action while the next speeches are spoken.*]

COLUMBINE (*walking backwards*). I shall always love you no matter how fat you get.

GELSOMINO (*indignantly*). I shall not do it. Even to keep your love.

[*Now the sash is unwound and she stands holding her end, and he holds his end to his waist. They are four feet apart. She holds the sash taut and stands still and he revolves towards her, winding himself into the sash.*]

COLUMBINE (*as he winds himself into her arms*). Oh, 'Mino, why do you leave me always to fill the house with my loneliness?

GELSOMINO (*withdrawing from her as he knots his sash*). Because I have grown weary of pretending; of pretending that the trees are talking in whispers; that this is an old castle and I am your hero.

COLUMBINE. The trees do not talk among themselves any more.

[*Note: Soon after opening of play, the sunshine grows dimmer and dimmer until it disappears at Gelsomino's exit.*]

GELSOMINO. They never did.

COLUMBINE. You said you heard them.

BAYOU HARLEQUINADE

GELSOMINO. I said it to please you.

COLUMBINE (*heartbroken*). Oh!

GELSOMINO. I might as well tell you, Columbine, that I am weary of this lonely bayou country. I want to move into town and live a normal life. (*Pause.*) I wish to be a barber.

COLUMBINE. A barber?

GELSOMINO (*shyly*). It has been my dream since I was a boy.

COLUMBINE. Do the pretty colored bottles attract you so much?

GELSOMINO. It is something I—I—have never told you. (*Appealingly.*) I have thought out many sage observations on topics of the day. I can find no one to listen to me. I should like to be a barber and wind a towel tightly about a man to hold him fast to listen to me while I talk to my heart's content. That is the traditional privilege of the barber—to give forth opinions without contradictions or interruptions.

COLUMBINE (*eagerly*). I will sit in a chair with a towel about me and you may cut my hair a quarter of an inch each day and I shall listen ever so eagerly to your wise observations.

GELSOMINO. You are not wise enough to know how wise my observations might be.

COLUMBINE (*hanging her head*). Oh!

GELSOMINO. So . . . (*Pause while he looks for his hat.*)

I must hurry else the good Curate will be away on some of his kindly ministrings and I shall miss him.

COLUMBINE. Then if you must go, take a piece of cake to the Curate.

[*Proffers the plate holding the cooky and the rose.*]

GELSOMINO (*taking the cooky*). Bah! This isn't enough to fill a hollow tooth!

COLUMBINE. Ah! It was a very small cake.

GELSOMINO. Let the birds have the rest of it. (*He throws it in the general direction of the garden. It falls into*

BAYOU HARLEQUINADE

his hat. He fails to note this.) Why am I waiting, pray? Already the bayous from here to Charenton are full of evening shadows.

[Indeed the sun has gone down and the light in the room is dimmer.]

COLUMBINE. If you will not stay, give this rose to the curate's sister.

GELSOMINO. She has a garden full of roses. Why do you give her this?

COLUMBINE. Because I want her to like me. If she likes me, she'll not take you away from me.

GELSOMINO (*somewhat touched*). I — I — Columbine . . . (*But he fights off the tender feeling.*) But I *must* go. The buggy is already loaded with the tithing berries and the poke-salad. Now where . . .

COLUMBINE (*pointing sadly to his hat*). There!

[He puts it on as before. Again he faces her with an astonished look on his face. With two hands, he lifts the hat straight in the air. The pink cooky is setting on his head.]

GELSOMINO. Do not keep me in suspense. What beast is attacking me?

COLUMBINE. It is nothing.

GELSOMINO (*he reaches up and takes the cooky and throws it on the floor. He musses up his hair getting the crumbs out. He throws his hat on the floor in his temper, stamps on it, quickly retrieves it and brushes it off tenderly. He sets it on his head again and strides to the right window, fuming. At the window, he pauses, trying to find an epithet to suit the occasion.*) Oh, you — you — you — (*It comes to him. He mouths it in withering scorn.*) You — WOMAN!

[He exits. Columbine takes a handkerchief from her bosom and touches it briefly to each eye. She sighs and picks up the rose, the magnolia and the piece of cooky and sets them on the plate on the table. She leans against the piano and picks out one or two minor notes. Sighs.]

BAYOU HARLEQUINADE

Crosses to right window. Closes it and draws the curtains. Lights candles on the piano. Crosses to left window to close it, when she is startled to see Harlequin leaning against the window jamb.

HARLEQUIN. Hello, Columbine.

COLUMBINE (*inquiringly*). Hello? But I don't believe I know you.

HARLEQUIN. Harlequin is the name.

COLUMBINE. There is something familiar about the name — about you.

HARLEQUIN. That is because we have always known each other.

COLUMBINE. Ah! But I never saw you before.

HARLEQUIN. And that has nothing to do with it.

COLUMBINE. I know! You're from the Mardi Gras at New Orleans. Yours is the costume most commonly worn there.

HARLEQUIN. I am from Venice, out of the thirteenth century.

COLUMBINE (*puzzled*). What do you say?

HARLEQUIN. But I do come to you by way of New Orleans.

COLUMBINE. Ah! (*Putting her hands over her eyes.*) Don't tell me! In another moment, I'll remember who you really are.

HARLEQUIN. Think! Think! Another time . . . another world . . .

COLUMBINE (*counting on her fingers*). I seem to recall, Pantaloon, Punchinello and the Clown. Vaguely someone called Pierrot . . . but Harlequin . . .

HARLEQUIN. It is no matter. (*He steps into the room and looks around.*) So Pierrot has left you again. The way he has always left you since the beginning of recorded time.

COLUMBINE (*sadly*). No one has left me excepting my husband, Gelsomino.

HARLEQUIN (*airily*). The name doesn't matter. It is the

BAYOU HARLEQUINADE

same person. (*Pause.*) You know, of course, that he has gone to see Pierrette?

COLUMBINE. Pierrette? There is no one by that name lives in this bayou.

HARLEQUIN. This seems to be a very bad century to look you up in. The last time I saw you was in the eighteenth century and your memory was perfect then.

COLUMBINE. Is there something I should remember?

HARLEQUIN. Oh, Columbine, you haven't forgotten Mount Olynpus from whence we came?

COLUMBINE. I haven't *come* from any place because I've never been *out* of Louisiana.

HARLEQUIN. Think! Think hard! Do you not recall that we were gods once? In another time, another planet?

COLUMBINE (*clapping her hands in delight*). Oh, you're going to tell me a pretty story. (*She indicates the settee, graciously.*) Won't you sit down?

HARLEQUIN. Alas! I cannot in this costume. It is made for leaning . . . (*He leans against the door jamb.*) For sighing . . . (*He fetches up a deep sigh.*) For singing . . . (*He puts his hand to his heart.*) For lying . . . (*He indicates the floor.*) But not for sitting.

COLUMBINE. Oh! (*Graciously.*) Won't you . . . (*Pause.*) lie down?

HARLEQUIN. Thank you, I will.

[*Columbine sits in armchair which is left of table. Harlequin throws himself at her feet. He supports himself on his elbow, facing downstage and looks back over his shoulder as he talks to her.*]

COLUMBINE. Now! Once upon a time . . .

HARLEQUIN. You were the goddess called Psyche.

COLUMBINE. Why?

HARLEQUIN. You were the only goddess who boasted a soul. The other gods and goddesses were all fine people, you understand, but lacking a soul, they lacked a little bit in humanity.

COLUMBINE. Did they like me?

HARLEQUIN. All the gods adored you and the goddesses gossiped about you. You didn't lack for lovers.

COLUMBINE. But . . .

HARLEQUIN. But you wanted to be loved for your soul as well as for your beauty.

COLUMBINE. However . . .

HARLEQUIN. However, gods that are nothing but gods know little of the soul — its hopes and its fears; its frailties and tears. You know how it is with the gods. Ev'rything perfect?

COLUMBINE. So . . .

HARLEQUIN. So you ran away from the gods and came to earth because you had need of human and soul satisfying love.

COLUMBINE. I remember dreaming long ago, that I flew down to earth from a cloud. (*Pause.*) I woke up before I hit the ground. (*Pause.*) What did happen when I . . . when Psyche reached the earth?

HARLEQUIN. Your wings dropped off.

COLUMBINE. Oh, dear!

HARLEQUIN. You never got over missing them; you know you didn't. (*Supporting himself on his hand and raising himself higher.*) That's why you have bows on all your dresses there, where the wings should be.

COLUMBINE (*she touches the bows on her shoulders, straightens up and throws her head back as if to meet the wind*). Where . . .

HARLEQUIN. There! Don't you get back that old flying feeling?

COLUMBINE (*clasping her hands in her lap*). Nonsense (*Pause.*) It's a very pretty story, though.

HARLEQUIN. Do you love me, Columbine?

COLUMBINE (*flustered, rises*). Why! What a thing to say. And we're not even introduced.

HARLEQUIN. Sit down and stop being so worldly. I'll go on with the story.

BAYOU HARLEQUINADE

COLUMBINE. No. Tell me about you.

HARLEQUIN. Me? I am Harlequin.

COLUMBINE. What god do you pretend to have been?

HARLEQUIN. I *was* Mercury.

COLUMBINE. Oh, no, you weren't. Mercury had wings to his feet. And I don't see any bows at your heels.

HARLEQUIN. I cannot tell you how sadly I miss my wings. Once I put my confidence in a cobbler in Ireland who had laid claim to dancing with the little folks. He told me he couldn't supply wings but would give me the next best thing.

COLUMBINE. And?

HARLEQUIN (*disgusted*). And all he did was put rubber heels on my shoes.

[*He turns over on his stomach and lifts his foot towards his head. He looks back at it. Columbine leans forward to look at his heel.*]

COLUMBINE. Why, sure enough! There's a small pair of wings stamped in the rubber. I daresay he believed he gave you wings—or the next best thing. (*She rises.*) Well, my bows and your heels won't change into wings. Therefore, we are earthbound, you and I. We couldn't get back to Mount Olympus even if we wanted to.

HARLEQUIN (*kneeling*). Yes! Yes! There is a way. It is said that if you ever find a love as great as your own, you'll get back to the gods again. (*Taking her hand.*) Columbine, love me as I have loved you down through the ages and we will have wings again.

COLUMBINE (*turning away from him*). I love my husband.

HARLEQUIN. Your husband, Pierrot . . .

COLUMBINE. Gelsomino . . .

HARLEQUIN. Will always leave you.

COLUMBINE (*hanging her head*). I know.

HARLEQUIN. In his life, there will always be . . .

COLUMBINE. A woman.

HARLEQUIN. He will always seek out . . .

COLUMBINE. The Curate's sister.

HARLEQUIN. Pierrette.

COLUMBINE (*her head hanging lower*). Yes.

HARLEQUIN (*getting to his feet*). Come away with me, Columbine. Eons ago, before time had any meaning, I loved you. I loved you through all the ages of the world. And in the eternity to come when time is something no longer understood, there will be something of me to love whatever memory of you is left along with what shall then pass for stars.

COLUMBINE. I love Gelsomino.

HARLEQUIN. He has never loved you, never will, not as much as you love him. He will always yearn after someone else.

COLUMBINE. He will change. When he opens up his barber shop. Oh, I'm sure of it.

HARLEQUIN. Pierrot a barber?

[*He laughs.*]

COLUMBINE. He has an earnest mind and is very wise. Therefore, he would be a barber. (*Happily.*) As a barber, his days would be spent among men. Not women and . . .

HARLEQUIN. Ah! But women, too, go to barber shops nowadays.

COLUMBINE. Oh, dear! (*Happily.*) But he will have none of them because they will not understand his wisdom.

HARLEQUIN. Oh, no? Pierrot will take up his comb and hold it thus: (*He illustrates, holding an imaginary comb before him and squinting past it as an artist squints past his brush at his model.*) And say: There is so much of sunshine tangled in madame's hair that I despair of setting the curls in order.

COLUMBINE. Yes. That sounds like him.

HARLEQUIN. And madame will say: La! How wise you are!

COLUMBINE. And will tell other women of . . .

HARLEQUIN. The wise barber! The barber wise enough

BAYOU HARLEQUINADE

to find sunshine and stardust in his lady-customers' hair.

COLUMBINE (*jealous but hiding it, as she thinks, successfully*). But why should I care?

HARLEQUIN. Good! Why, indeed! Then you will elope with me.

COLUMBINE. Why?

HARLEQUIN. Not caring, you'll go. It is as inevitable as night following day. (*Pause.*) Besides, it is in the tradition. You have no choice. Hurry, Columbine.

COLUMBINE. Oh, I could not leave my dear Gelsomino.

HARLEQUIN. He would be grateful to you.

COLUMBINE (*sadly*). I expect he would.

HARLEQUIN. Besides, you have always left him. (*Sadly.*) And have always returned to him.

COLUMBINE (*joyously*). Then I would return? (*Decisively.*) Then I'll go.

HARLEQUIN. You'll return. Perhaps in an hour, a year, a hundred years. But you'll return. It is the tradition. (*Pause.*) Now let us hurry with our elopement.

COLUMBINE. Oh, I'm ready. It seems I've always been ready. Only this morning, I baked two pink cakes, one for Gelsomino and one for — eloping, I guess. I'll get them. (*As she is about to exit door right.*) Play and sing something while you wait.

HARLEQUIN. Alas! I pawned my lute in Germany a century ago.

COLUMBINE. There is the piano.

HARLEQUIN. I cannot sit down to it. My costume, you know.

COLUMBINE. Try!

[*She exits.*]

HARLEQUIN (*sits gingerly on edge of chair with just one inch of his body touching the wood. His left leg is extended straight out to the side in a long stiff line. His right leg is straight out before him. In this uncomfortable position, he strikes a chord and sings*).

BAYOU HARLEQUINADE

"Old Bayou Moon-Man
Please let me dream some more.
Just like the dream I had
A year before.
I dreamed about my Columbine
She was so sweet.
And when she said she'd go with me
My heart did skip a beat.
And when I kissed her . . ."

COLUMBINE (*entering with a tiny basket*). But you haven't, you know.

HARLEQUIN. No.

[*He rises and goes to her.*]

COLUMBINE. But first we must elope. (*As he tries to kiss her.*) You said so yourself. Hurry! Hurry!

[*They exit left French window as Gelsomino enters from right French window. He carries three bottles under his arm. They are pretty bottles and one contains red liquor, the second green and the third, blue. He carries a flat box under his other arm. He places the bottles on the piano as he enters.*]

GELSOMINO. Columbine! Columbine! Where are you?

COLUMBINE (*off to Harlequin*). Pierrot has returned.

GELSOMINO. It is I, your 'Mino, come back to you.
Where are you?

COLUMBINE (*off, faintly as though she were walking away*). You will never find me, Gelsomino.

GELSOMINO. Ah! You wish to play an old childish game again. Hide and seek.

COLUMBINE (*faintly*). I am leaving you, Gelsomino.

GELSOMINO (*frightened*). No! No! It is but one of your games. See! I will play with you. I will count to ten and then find you.

COLUMBINE (*very faintly*). Goodbye, 'Mino.

GELSOMINO (*calling out into the dark garden*). Columbine! Columbine! I am having a bad dream. (*He is*

BAYOU HARLEQUINADE

frantic.) I am dreaming that you are leaving me. I am dreaming that I'll never see you again. (*He walks about the room.*) I want to wake up. I want to wake up. Columbine! (*Silence.*) I will count up to thirty. Then I shall wake up and you will be standing by me. (*He buries his face in his arms on the piano and starts to count.*) One-two-three-four-five-six-seven-eight-nine-ten. (*He looks up and calls.*) Columbine! (*He waits. Silence.*) Eleven-twelve-thirteen-fourteen-fifteen-sixteen-seventeen-eighteen-nineteen-twenty. [*He looks up.*

COLUMBINE (*off*). Goodbye . . . (*He puts his head down in his arms and does not hear the next word.*) Good-bye, Harlequin.

GELSOMINO. Twenty-one-two-three-four-five- (*Columbine slips in through the left window, her hat in her hand. When he reaches the number "thirty," he looks up slowly and fearfully. He is overcome with joy when he sees her.*) Oh, Columbine. You are here! You didn't leave me after all.

COLUMBINE (*slowly*). No, 'Mino. I didn't after all.

GELSOMINO. You didn't really plan to, you know. (*He waits for her agreement. She looks at him slowly.*) Naturally you didn't. No! (*Sincerely.*) Why, you know I couldn't live without you.

COLUMBINE. I know. Without a Columbine to make jealous, philandering with Pierrette would lose its charm.

GELSOMINO. How you talk! (*Anxious to change the subject.*) But I am hungry. (*Sees her basket.*) Ah! You have a cake for me.

COLUMBINE (*giving it to him sadly*). It was to be my elopement cake.

GELSOMINO. How full of fancies you are! (*Takes a bite.*) But you bake very good cake.

COLUMBINE. Tell me: Have you seen Pierrette?

BAYOU HARLEQUINADE

GELSOMINO (*stops chewing to stare in bewilderment*).

Pierrette? Oh! You must mean Agnes, the Curate's sister.

[*He takes another bite.*]

COLUMBINE. Yes.

GELSOMINO. No! (*Bite.*) I have not seen her. (*Pause.*)

I met Jacques on my way into the village and we stopped to talk awhile. He told me that his wife told him that Agnes, the Curate's sister, was heard to remark at the last meeting of the Ladies' Sewing Society . . . (*He turns aside.*) No. It is too silly to repeat.

COLUMBINE (*continuing*). Was heard to remark that you would be bald before you were forty.

GELSOMINO (*airily*). Some such nonsense as that.

(*Pause.*) All of a sudden it occurred to me, that I hadn't been treating you very kindly, Columbine. I thought that you might do something foolish — such as run away from me — so I turned the buggy right around and hurried back home, where I found you . . . (*Pause.*) after a little while.

COLUMBINE. 'Mino, I wish to tell you . . .

GELSOMINO (*tensely, taking her hands*). Columbine, tell me that you will always love me. Even if I do grow fat and bald. (*Airily.*) Although that is an utter impossibility. (*Silence.*) Tell me that you'll never leave me.

COLUMBINE (*wisely*). We shall see. (*Pause.*) Besides, you'd have your barber shop.

GELSOMINO. No, Columbine. I could not leave you — even for a barber shop. (*Pause, while he indicates the bottles on the table.*) I have been carrying the equipment around under my buggy seat waiting to find a suitable store in the village to rent. But I have decided to bring my barber shop to you. If you will let me cut your hair and utter wise sayings while trimming it . . .

BAYOU HARLEQUINADE

COLUMBINE. Oh, yes! Yes, indeed! What lovely hair tonics!

[She holds up a bottle, admiring it while he opens the box and reveals a long comb, a pair of shears and the covering barbers use on their customers.]

GELSOMINO. Now if you will sit here, my dear, I should like to start being a barber immediately. *(She sits in the armchair next to the table. He wraps the covering about her.)* First the tonic that smells so divinely and sprinkles out so cleverly. *(He shakes the tonic over her head.)* And now! *(He holds the comb in his left hand and clicks the shears in his other.)* How will madame have it trimmed?

COLUMBINE. Not so fast! Where are the words of wisdom that go with your trade?

GELSOMINO. Ah, yes! *(Thinks a moment and then takes the pose Harlequin illustrated.)* There is so much of sunshine tangled in madame's hair that I despair of setting the curls in order.

COLUMBINE *(rises and stamps her feet in fury)*. That is the most stupid remark I ever heard! Besides being unoriginal, it comes from the lips only — not from the heart or the soul.

GELSOMINO. I'll try again. *(Pompously.)* There will always be wars and rumors of wars. *(Explaining.)* That's a political observation.

COLUMBINE. That's a pointless observation. Now if you had a way to end wars, I'd consider *that* wise. *(Unfastens the covering.)* No, Gelsomino. I have grown up. I consider barbering a silly game.

GELSOMINO *(fastening the covering again)*. Please sit down and be my old Columbine again who used to believe everything I said.

COLUMBINE. Ah, 'Mino, I believe those happy days are gone forever.

GELSOMINO. Wait! Wait! I have a wise observation.

BAYOU HARLEQUINADE

(*Eagerly.*) Somehow, you seem like a goddess to me. Those bows on your shoulders seem like wings . . .

COLUMBINE. H-m-m! Not bad. (*She sits down again.*)

Oh, 'Mino, could you not search deep down in your soul and bring up some observation wise enough to hold us together for all time? (*Pause. He scowls thoughtfully.*) Oh, try, 'Mino! Try.

GELSOMINO (*he scowls tensely and shudders violently*).

I am trying. (*More shuddering.*) I think I'm getting it. (*He grows calm.*) I have the thought now. But it seems a very plain thought. You may be disappointed at its lack of wisdom.

COLUMBINE (*leans forward. Speaks gently*). No! Tell me, 'Mino.

GELSOMINO (*sinks to his knees beside her chair. He looks into her face and speaks sincerely.*) Here it is. From the depths of my heart and soul.

[*Pause.*]

COLUMBINE. Say it!

GELSOMINO. Oh, Columbine, I've been an awful fool.

COLUMBINE (*in awe*). Why, that's the wisest thing a mortal man has ever said to a woman.

[*He buries his head in her lap and she bends her face down to lay her cheek against his hair as . . .*]

Curtain.

THE CLOAK OF EVIL

(Part Two in the Wayside Inn trilogy. Part One, The Inn of Return, was included in Twenty Short Plays on a Royalty Holiday, Vol. I.)

By

DON C. JONES

CAST

DOCTOR DARBY.

SIDNEY TRAVERS.

ZAMBI.

THE RUNT.

THE WIFE OF ZAMBI.

THE STRANGER.

THE GHOST OF MARY KESTER.

THE TIME. The present.

THE PLACE. Wayside Inn, New England.

THE CLOAK OF EVIL

The setting: The same as for The Inn of Return. Down center is an old-fashioned leather-covered armchair. To the left of it and slightly up stage is an equally old-fashioned hotel davenport; while left of that, slightly facing a fireplace down left, is a mate to the chair center. Up left is the entrance which leads to the outer hall of the Inn. Up right the stair hall entrance is viewed. Down right is the clerk's desk with all its necessary paraphernalia, such as key rack, mail rack, vault, office lamp on the desk, and anything else that might generally add to the conglomeration. Up center is a large window through which the misty forms of trees can be seen beyond. Between the window and the entrance left center is a large black trunk upon which the words THE GREAT ZAMBI are lettered. The stage is dimly lighted, having only a reading lamp behind the davenport and the lamp on the clerk's desk to serve as illumination.

At rise: The room is deserted for a moment. Travers enters left carrying two bags. He goes directly to the clerk's desk, puts down his bags. He thumps the small hand bell on the desk several times, then begins removing his pigskin gloves. He looks about the room, smiles, and finally turns toward the desk just as Doctor Darby enters right. Darby does not at first notice his guest, but sleepily pushes out the registry.

DARBY. Will you sign this, please?

[Travers, still smiling, keeps his head down and scribbles his name in the book. He pushes it back toward Darby, who takes it, reads it, then quickly snaps up his head.]

DARBY. Travers!

THE CLOAK OF EVIL

TRAVERS. I was wondering if you'd ever get around to recognizing me. After all, I've only been away two months.

DARBY. So you came back. Frankly, I didn't ever expect to see you again after what happened. I thought maybe you'd have enough sense to stay away from this God-forsaken place.

TRAVERS. Well, if that's queer, how about you standing behind the clerk's desk? Has the medical profession become so bad?

DARBY (*coming from behind the desk*). Jonathon's sick. And after we . . . after Charlie Cook died he was left without a clerk. You can't imagine how difficult it is to get someone to work in this place. There are ugly rumors floating about that this place is unhealthy. Contaminated by vampires and werewolves. Well, maybe not quite that bad, but anyway I've got to be clerk and anything else until Jonathon can get someone to work for him. Now what about yourself? Come on over and sit down.

[*They go to the sofa.*]

TRAVERS. About me? Nothing much. I had to come back, you know. The old Inn Theory? He who visits once must come again?

DARBY. It's too late for jokes, Travers. That return business was exploited only for Charlie Cook's benefit.

TRAVERS. "Benefit" is hardly the word.

DARBY. At any rate, let's have the truth. Why are you back? I thought you were sailing for London immediately upon leaving here two months ago.

TRAVERS. England? Un-uh. I don't think I'll ever go back. England is full of black atmosphere. Half female diplomats chasing around with umbrellas in their hands. No, I don't like that. Besides . . . I'm going to do a book about the Inn of Return, in spite of the fact that I swore I never would.

THE CLOAK OF EVIL

DARBY (*smiling*). So? The book, eh? Well, that clarifies things. What a writer won't do for a book!

TRAVERS. All joking aside though, Doctor, things have been pretty dull around here in the last two months.

DARBY (*after a pause*). Yes. . . . Maybe, no.

TRAVERS. Doc, that's a trite and ambiguous answer. Come on, let's have the real thing.

DARBY. Well, there are always peculiar people, and back of them peculiar motives. Take the case of Mrs. Kester who died here in the Inn only a week ago. Y'know, Travers, that was as queer a case as I've seen in years. Queer because . . . so many little things were constantly bobbing up to complicate my understanding the woman.

[He stares off into space for a moment.]

TRAVERS. Excuse my impatience, Doctor, but . . .

DARBY. Of course, of course. Well, when Mary Kester first arrived, I had a difficult time gaining any kind of an acquaintance with her. Principally, I suppose because I was a doctor, and she knew she was going to die and was glad of it. Well . . . the two of us couldn't avoid each other forever . . . we finally met; she made me promise I wouldn't try to cure her. I was lying.

TRAVERS. Well, evidently you didn't cure her.

DARBY. No . . . no, I made an error in my very meagre analysis. I thought her trouble was psychological rather than physical.

TRAVERS. What do you mean . . . something like neurasthenia?

DARBY. Not at all. I thought she was simply suffering from a persecution complex. But I'm not sure now. I'm not sure of anything.

TRAVERS. Dammit, Darby, quit going around in circles and let's have the story.

DARBY. All right, here it is without the frills. She came

THE CLOAK OF EVIL

here, she was sick, she died, she was buried. Not much to that, eh? But hold on. She was buried with about ten thousand dollars' worth of jewels about her person. Jewels her husband had spent a lifetime buying for her.

TRAVERS. Now, I'm ready for motivations. Why? What was the matter with her? Why did she come to this place anyway?

DABBY. All right, one at a time. Why was she buried with her jewels? Well, she explained that to me before she died. It seems that her family was the grasping sort, the type of vultures who with big eager eyes look down upon a carcass and wait for it to get cold. She insisted that they weren't going to get one penny's worth. Besides, she said, she wanted to be wearing every jewel when her husband came.

TRAVERS. When her husband came? Doctor, what are you talking about?

DABBY. I repeat . . . she wanted to be wearing her jewels when her husband came. Clear enough?

TRAVERS. By Jove, Doctor, I've got to confess it isn't. What about this husband of hers? What kind of a chap was he? And why should she think he was going to come to her here?

DABBY. I don't know. You must remember, Travers, I had to worm every bit of information I got. Come to think of it though, I do remember one thing. Her husband was apparently one of those individuals who are always striving for greener pastures. I understand he'd go off for sometimes a year or two and never be heard from, and then he'd come back, no richer or poorer than he was before he left.

TRAVERS. And his wife put up with that?

DABBY. Apparently. I guess he loved his wife, and she loved him. She understood him, understood his desires, never stood in his way. I remember Mary Kester telling me, the old man promised he would some day

THE CLOAK OF EVIL

come home to stay. That may be what she meant when she said she wanted to be wearing her jewels when he came.

TRAVERS. Hmm. . . . (*Shrugs.*) Well, I must get a room. (*Rises.*) I can't sit here all evening in my topcoat, you know.

DARBY. You're quite right. (*Rises and walks toward the key rack.*) I suppose you want your old room?

TRAVERS. If that's possible, yes. (*His eyes catch the trunk standing by the window. He walks slowly toward it, as Darby removes a key from the rack.*) By the way, old man, who owns this thing? (*He notices the lettering on the side.*) The Great Zambis, eh? Who's he? Can't say I've ever heard of him.

DARBY. He's a ventriloquist. Keeps his dummy in there.

TRAVERS. But I say, it seems awfully large for a dummy, doesn't it? Have you ever seen it?

DARBY. Zambis just arrived this afternoon. I barely met him. He's a queer duck, Travers. He and his wife pulled in here this afternoon, and I happen to know that the rest of his vaudeville troupe has gone through to Bayport where they open tomorrow. There's something wrong here. Something . . .

TRAVERS (*laughing*). Doc, you're getting a villain complex. You suspect everyone and anything.

DARBY. You laugh, Travers, that's your privilege, of course. Sometimes I wish I could laugh at my hunches. I know most of them sound ridiculous, but I've been here too long and experimented with them too much for that. In any other place, I could very easily be wrong, but not here. I feel this place, Travers. Feel it! All about it lies a grim realm of terror and foreboding. You were a witness to an example of that a couple of months ago. No, I tell you, Travers, there's things we don't understand. Never will be able to understand.

THE CLOAK OF EVIL

TRAVERS. I'm not sure I catch the drift of your conversation.

DARBY (*coming from behind the desk with the key in his hand. He approaches Travers*). Have you ever noticed that things in this world seem to mesh together? Maybe at first they don't seem to, but after a while, as you think back upon them, and study the situations involved, you come to a realization. Everything happens for a purpose.

TRAVERS. Wars included?

DARBY. Everything.

TRAVERS. Doc, for a man of science you're talking rot. You're tired, and I think maybe just a little mad. At any rate I'm going to take my bags upstairs and settle myself. The key?

DARBY (*pauses a minute then hands it to Travers*). If you don't mind, I'll go up with you.

TRAVERS. Excellent. No more talk about your peculiar brand of fatalism though. You'll get me to thinking, and when I'm thinking I can't sleep.

[*Travers walks to the desk and picks up his two bags.*]

DARBY. I'll take one of those, Travers.

TRAVERS. Thanks, but I think I've got them.

[*They start for the door upper right. Before they reach the door Zambi enters, blocking their exit. He bows himself graciously out of the way.*]

ZAMBI (*suavely*). I am so sorry, Doctor.

DARBY. That's all right. It isn't your fault this hall's so narrow. Mr. Zambi, I'd like to have you meet a friend of mine, Mr. Travers.

TRAVERS. Excuse the bags, old man. How do you do!

ZAMBI (*eyeing him carefully for a moment*). I am very pleased to make your acquaintance, Mr. Travers.

TRAVERS. We're just going upstairs now. Perhaps later in the evening the three of us could get together, eh? Have a little chat.

ZAMBI. Of course. Certainly, I should be very pleased.

THE CLOAK OF EVIL

[Travers and Darby go off stage upper right. Zambi watches the hall entrance for a few moments, then walks swiftly to the trunk upper left. He removes a key from his pocket, looks nervously around, then quickly inserts the key in the trunk and swings open the lid. He glances about again then . . .

ZAMBI (*his suaveness gone*). All right, get out. Hurry it up. That meddling doctor will be popping down again.

[A head appears over the edge of the trunk, then the shoulders. Zambi pulls the figure out of the trunk, and a small dwarf is to be seen. He is made up to look like a ventriloquist's dummy . . . a sort of grotesque Charley McCarthy.

RUNT. I ain't had nothing to eat since morning. How about it?

ZAMBI. Not so loud. (*Reaches in his pocket and pulls out a sandwich.*) Here . . .

[The Runt snatches it out of his hand and begins cramming it down.

RUNT (*between bites*). What's up?

ZAMBI. Now listen carefully. I haven't told you about this before, and it may take your moronic brain some time to absorb it.

RUNT. Let's get to the point.

ZAMBI. About a week ago an old woman died at this joint. She was buried in that small graveyard up on the knoll. . . .

RUNT. Say . . . that who the doc and that other guy were talking about? I heard 'em! Funny talk too.

ZAMBI. What do you mean, funny talk? Come, speak up.

RUNT. Well, I don't know, Zambi. I can't remember all that high-falutin' talk.

ZAMBI. You little imbecile! Come on. Think!

RUNT. Well, they said something about her old man coming to see her, or something like that.

THE CLOAK OF EVIL

ZAMBI. Her father?

RUNT. Naw. Her old man. Her husband. You know, like you are to Franci.

ZAMBI. You heard wrong. He's been dead for years.

RUNT. Well, hell, I don't know everything. What's that got to do with us?

ZAMBI. Wait a minute, what else did you hear?

RUNT (*thinking hard*). Oh, yeah. She was buried wearing a pile of crockery. Worth about ten thousand, I guess.

ZAMBI (*smiling*). More than I had hoped for . . .

RUNT. Well, let's have it, Zambi. What kind of a racket you got planned now?

ZAMBI. That woman was my aunt. She's lousy with jewelry, and she thought she was going to cut me off without a thing. I don't like that.

RUNT. Yeah. . . .

ZAMBI. Tonight you're going out and dig up that grave. I want those jewels. All of them.

RUNT. You and me part ways here, Zambi. No grave diggin' for me.

ZAMBI (*grabbing the Runt by his coat lapels*). Listen, you little sawed-off pint of whiskey, where would you be without me?

RUNT. I'd be doin' somethin' honest, that's a cinch. I wouldn't be fakin' myself off as a cheap ventriloquist's dummy. The great Zambi. . . . Ha! The great Runt, that's what it is. It's me that's good, not you. It's me that puts over that act, and what do I get? Thirty percent!

ZAMBI. All right, I'll make you a deal. You get those jewels and you get half.

RUNT. Half the sparklers?

ZAMBI. I talk English.

RUNT. Sure you do. How come you ain't doin' this yourself?

ZAMBI. Where's your brains, Runt? Listen, if I'm here

THE CLOAK OF EVIL

all the time I got an alibi, haven't I? And I ask you, who is going to suspect a ventriloquist's dummy? Who?

RUNT. Yeah, maybe you're right. . . .

ZAMBI. Sure, I am. Now listen. I found out that her grave is marked with a small stone which simply has her name, Mary Kester, on it. You'll find a shovel and a pick in that first covert as you go up the road to the graveyard. Now don't leave any clues. Get rid of everything; and if someone sees you, run back into the woods and lie low. You won't have any trouble digging. The grave is still soft.

RUNT. Yeah . . . and I get half, huh?

ZAMBI. Sure . . . and be careful when you come back. Don't come into this room until I'm all alone. You got that?

RUNT. Yeah, I got it.

ZAMBI. All right, then. Crawl along the ditch all the way. Don't take any chances whatsoever, but get the stuff. And work fast.

RUNT. Sure.

ZAMBI. Get going then.

[He starts pushing him toward the door left.]

RUNT. Sure.

[He exits left center. Zambi goes to the window and watches for a moment. While he is looking out, his wife enters the hall upper right.]

WIFE. I thought I heard you talking to the Runt, Joe.

ZAMBI (*whirling around to face her*). What are you doing down here? It's late, why aren't you in bed?

WIFE. What about yourself? Where's the Runt?

ZAMBI. I let him out for a little air. It gets stuffy in that trunk.

[He goes over and shuts down the trunk lid.]

WIFE. Joe, I don't know what you're up to, but I don't like it. I think it's about time you organized a new racket.

THE CLOAK OF EVIL

ZAMBI. What's the matter now? I guess we're doin' all right, aren't we? The Runt and I are featured on the bill.

WIFE. Sure, you're featured. But someday people are going to find out your dummy is a fake. What are you going to do then?

ZAMBI. We got plenty of time to worry about that.

WIFE (*coming to him*). All I'm asking, Joe, is that you don't take so many chances. Like lettin' the Runt out tonight.

ZAMBI. The Runt's careful. He won't slip.

WIFE. What are you talking about? Joe, you're not up to something?

ZAMBI. I think you better go back to bed, Franci. The Doc and a friend are coming down to talk in a little while.

WIFE. They're not wise, are they?

ZAMBI. Franci, will you quit worrying? You'd think I was doing something dishonest. Now go on back to bed, will you?

WIFE. Yeah . . .

ZAMBI. Say, what's the matter with you?

WIFE. I don't know . . . I got a feeling tonight. Like something's going to happen. I just wanted to talk to you.

ZAMBI. You imagine too much, Franci. Go on back to bed.

WIFE. Yeah, I guess I will. You coming up pretty soon?

ZAMBI. Sure . . . as soon as the Runt gets back. (*Nervously.*) Now will you get upstairs and quit yapping?

[*She looks suspiciously, nervously at him a moment, then turns and goes out the hall upper right. Zambi goes to the window . . . shields his eyes from the room light and peers out into the darkness. He fumbles for a cigarette. Lights it. He paces to the davenport . . . sits down, but is soon up and back at the window. A mo-*

THE CLOAK OF EVIL

ment later Darby and Travers enter upper right. They notice Zambi peering out the window and the two exchange glances.

DARBY. Expecting someone, Zambi?

ZAMBI (*trying nonchalantly to turn around*). No . . . the fogs are pretty heavy around this part of the country, aren't they?

TRAVERS. My father used to call a fog "The Cloak of Evil."

DARBY. "The Cloak of Evil." Not bad. Of all the hideous crimes, I wonder just how many thousand were committed under that cloak?

ZAMBI. Gentlemen, must we talk about crime?

TRAVERS. Of course not. Let's talk about your work, Zambi. It must be fascinating.

DARBY. Sure, come on over and sit down, Zambi. Tell us all about it.

[*Darby sits center. Travers goes to the davenport. Zambi follows him, trying to repress his anxiety as well as possible.*]

ZAMBI. Well, there's not much to say about my work. It does have its points.

TRAVERS. You know, I'd like to see your dummy. Doc says that's your trunk back there.

ZAMBI. Yes . . . yes, that's the trunk it's in. I'd rather not show him to you, though. You see—(*He attempts a weak laugh.*) I've got him all apart, and I'm afraid he wouldn't be . . . at his best tonight.

TRAVERS. Oh, that's all right. So much the better.

DARBY. Don't mind Travers, Zambi. He has a healthy curiosity.

ZAMBI. So I see. I'm afraid, though, I cannot show him to you. I hope you'll understand, but several features of the dummy are exclusively mine. I'd like to keep them that way.

[*The desk telephone rings.*]

DARBY. I guess I'd better take that. (*He rises and*

THE CLOAK OF EVIL

walks quickly to the phone.) Hello? (*Pause.*) Yes, this is Doctor Darby. . . . Again? All right, I'll be over. Yes, right away. Goodbye. (*Turning to Travers.*) Travers, I've got to go up the road a piece. Old Farmer Ade has been on a binge for the past three days, and I've got to sober him up. Want to come along?

TRAVERS. You bet!

DARBY. We'll have to go up and get our coats again. This weather's damn chilly.

TRAVERS. Righto.

[He rises quickly and follows Darby out the entrance up right. Immediately Zambi is up and over to the window. A moment later he turns his face toward door left. A stranger enters left. He is a tall, hatchet-faced individual. Gray streaks run through his dark hair. He wears a Van Dyke beard, small and immaculate. There is a look of worldliness about him. He is clothed in a very dark coat, and a black hat that allows very little of the upper portion of his face to be seen. He stands in the doorway a moment, then notices Zambi watching him. Zambi turns his head to look out the window again. The stranger walks into the room, surveys it carefully, then turns and silently watches Zambi for a minute. Zambi whirls.]

ZAMBI. If you want a room, you can ring the desk bell.

STRANGER. Room? (*He laughs, a light, hollow, bell-like laugh.*) No, I'm waiting for someone. I dare say you are too.

ZAMBI. I was watching the fog.

[He turns back to the window again.]

STRANGER (*still watching him*). Queer, these fogs. They create illusions.

ZAMBI (*turning to face him again*). What do you mean?

STRANGER. I mean things look different . . . perhaps they are different. People stir around in the fog, and

THE CLOAK OF EVIL

they look either smaller or larger depending on the angle of vision and so forth.

ZAMBI (*whose nervousness is becoming more apparent*).

What are you getting at, Mister?

STRANGER. Nothing in particular. I . . . was just thinking. . . .

ZAMBI. About what?

STRANGER. Can you see that graveyard from here?

ZAMBI. No . . . it's around the bend.

STRANGER. Unfortunate. . . .

ZAMBI. What? What's unfortunate?

STRANGER. That you can't see the graveyard. I could have shown you what I mean. You see . . . I thought I saw a very small man digging up a grave. Of course I was mistaken, because of the fog. (*He cocks his head in a peculiar way and stares straight at Zambì.*) I'm sure now it was only a hound that I saw.

ZAMBI (*his nervousness has turned into fright, but he tries his best to remain cool. His voice becomes too obviously smooth*). You said you were waiting for someone. Perhaps I can help you.

STRANGER. Yes . . . perhaps you can. She's quite tall, and she'll be dressed in black. She promised to meet me here.

ZAMBI. No, I'm sorry, I haven't seen her.

STRANGER. No . . . perhaps the time isn't right. I had rather thought it was tonight though. Well, I'll be going. . . .

[*He walks swiftly to the door left and disappears. Zambì dashes over to the window and peers out. He whirls around as Darby and Travers come down the stairs and enter the entrance right.*]

TRAVERS. Y'know, Doc, this fog reminds me of the last time I was here. Remember, it was raining then. Raining cats and dogs, as you Americans say.

DARBY. I remember. Well, shall we be going?

THE CLOAK OF EVIL

TRAVERS. Yes.

[He starts away, then turns suddenly and shoots another look out the window.]

DARBY. What's the matter?

TRAVERS. That's funny.

ZAMBI. Did you . . . see something?

TRAVERS. I guess not. I thought I did, though. Very queer looking too. Over there across the road a bit. I thought . . . oh, well.

DARBY. What were you going to say?

TRAVERS. I thought I saw some sort of a shape moving out there. It didn't look like anything in particular. Just a shape . . . a particularly dense piece of fog . . . or something like that.

DARBY (*sardonically*). Maybe someone is wearing the cloak of evil tonight.

TRAVERS (*glances at Darby a moment, then breaks into a light laugh*). Perhaps . . . well, shall we be on our way?

DARBY. I think we'd better. Good night, Zambi.

ZAMBI (*his features have frozen rigid during the last few speeches and a moment goes by before he answers Darby*). Oh. . . . Good night. . . . Good night.

[Darby and Travers exit left. The moment that Darby and Travers are clear of the room Zambi rushes to the window. His wife enters right.]

WIFE. Has the Runt come back, Joe?

ZAMBI (*facing her*). I thought I told you to go to bed.

WIFE. Yeah, I know you did, Joe, but I'm worried.

ZAMBI. Nonsense. What about?

WIFE (*coming to him*). I don't know, Joe. I've never felt like this before. Do you remember that old story about the king who had a sword suspended over his head by a hair? That's the way I feel. Like something was hanging in the air, and was going to fall.

ZAMBI. Franci, I'm not going to stand much more of this. Now, go on back to bed.

THE CLOAK OF EVIL

WIFE. All right.

[She exits right. Zambi returns to the window, and a moment later the Runt hurriedly enters left. The Runt draws a string of pearls and a bracelet from his pocket and quickly shoves them over to Zambi.]

ZAMBI. Come on, let's have the rest of them. This isn't all.

RUNT. It's all I got; it's all I'm going to get . . . I'm tellin' you, Zambi. . . .

ZAMBI. What's the matter with you?

RUNT. Sure, you can stand there nice and easy and ask what's the matter with me. You don't know, but you soon will.

ZAMBI. Cut the hysterics. What happened?

RUNT. That woman ain't dead!

ZAMBI. What are you talking about?

RUNT. That's a fact. When I jerked off the pearls, her head snapped up slightly, her eyes opened, and I saw her mouth move. I snatched the bracelet then, and took a squint over the edge of the grave. Know what I seen? I seen a guy watching me from the road. I thought I seen him once before when I was diggin', but I wasn't sure. But this time I was. He was standin' there in the road, the fog swirlin' about him, and him just standin' and staring. I crawled out of the grave, and took a last squint at the old dame. The fog started to pour over the edge until it wrapped all around her like a blanket or a . . . a cloak. More like a cloak. Then I run for the woods.

ZAMBI. You didn't cover up the grave? You left it open?

RUNT. I'm tellin' you, Zambi, you don't know what was happening out there . . . you wouldn't have done nothing else either.

ZAMBI. You fool!

RUNT. Yes, and I don't want none of those jewels. I don't want nothing more to do with 'em whatsoever. I

THE CLOAK OF EVIL

tell you that old babe was staring at me. Her eyes followed my hands when I was snatching the crockery.

ZAMBI (*disdainfully*). You're crazy, the old dame's been dead a week.

RUNT. All right, I'm crazy. But I don't want nothing to do with that stuff. If you'd have seen the way she looked lying down there in the black dirt, staring at me . . . and every once in a while . . . twitching a little.

ZAMBI. That's enough. You better get back in the trunk.

RUNT. I don't want to be around here. I want to get out right now.

ZAMBI. You aren't suggesting that you'd like to leave me, are you?

RUNT. You talk too much. I am going to leave you.

ZAMBI. Listen to me, Runt. (*He catches him by the coat lapel.*) You want me to talk plain. You know too much, see? You stick with me and work just the way we've been doing, and nothin's going to happen. But if you decide to go . . . you go dead.

RUNT. I ain't afraid of dying. There's things worse than dying. And let me tell you, Zambi, you're in for 'em. If you'd 'a' seen that old dame staring up at me, and the heavy fog clinging to the ground, coming down over the edges of the grave, and drifting around her face and body until it looked like she was wearing a cloak of fog. Yeah, that's what it looked like; a cloak of fog.

ZAMBI. Shut up, that's enough.

RUNT. Scared, huh? Well, I am too. But I seen her, and you won't be really scared until you see her too.

ZAMBI. What do you mean?

RUNT. I don't know. I don't know unless she could get up and crawl out of the grave wearing that cloak of fog.

ZAMBI. Will you shut up about the cloak! (*Pause.*)

THE CLOAK OF EVIL

Now get in the trunk before the Doc gets back again.

RUNT. All right, I'll get in just to keep out of the Doc's sight; but when he ain't here, you got to let me out.

ZAMBI. Sure.

[He goes quickly to the trunk, keys it open and the Runt crawls in. Zambi quickly closes down the lid. He fastens the lid down, then nervously starts away from the trunk. The muffled voice of the Runt in the trunk calls him back.]

RUNT. Zambi!

ZAMBI. What'd you want?

RUNT. Let me out, Zambi. I can take it on the lam before the Doc comes back. I'll go some place and meet you, huh, Zambi? Then we can get together again and forget all about this place.

ZAMBI. Quit your yelling. You're driving me nuts.

RUNT. Then listen to me. Let me get away from here. You didn't see her, Zambi. . . . She's dead, I tell you, and yet she's alive. I seen her mouth move. You gotta let me out. I'll yell, Zambi. I'll see that I get out.

ZAMBI. You're staying, Runt. You're in this as much as me. Understand that? You're staying.

RUNT. Look down the road, Zambi. See anything?

ZAMBI. I'm not looking.

RUNT. She's wearing a black dress. You'll know her when she comes.

ZAMBI. Runt, I'm warning you. I've had enough.

RUNT (*laughs*). You're warning me! That's kind of funny. . . .

[He laughs almost hysterically.]

ZAMBI. Shut up, Runt. This is the last time I'm telling you.

RUNT. You can't stop me in here, Mister. Let me out, and let me get away. That's what you'll have to do. I'll never shut up as long as I'm in here. I'll keep on talking until she gets here, and then I won't have to talk any more. Neither of us will ever have to talk. . . .

THE CLOAK OF EVIL

Open that lid, Zambi, or I'll yell myself hoarse. I'll yell so that the whole world can hear me. (*Zambi removes a revolver from his pocket.*) Understand that? I'll yell so that she'll know just where to come. I'll yell so loud . . . (*Zambi pumps two shots into the top of the trunk.*) Thanks. . . . Thanks, Zambi. . . . I'm through now, but you . . .

[*Zambi hysterically throws open the trunk lid, then shuts it down quickly. He dashes to the window, looks out, then starts hurriedly for the entrance right. His wife enters before he makes it. Zambi stiffens, tries hard to be poised.*

WIFE. What happened?

ZAMBI. Why?

WIFE. I heard shots.

ZAMBI. You're nervous, sweetheart. Probably just a car backfiring on the road out there.

WIFE. You're lying. Something's wrong. Your face's white as a sheet.

ZAMBI (*after a moment's pause in which he turns his eyes toward the window and door left again*). Nothing's wrong, but this place is getting on my nerves. Why don't you go up and pack the bags? We'll blow into Bayport for the rest of the night.

WIFE. But, Joe, it's after twelve.

ZAMBI. I said to pack the bags. We're getting out of this place.

WIFE. Joe, tell me what's the matter.

VOICE FROM TRUNK (*not hysterically any more. Just taunting*). She should be here pretty soon, Zambi. Why don't you stick around and get it over with?

ZAMBI (*to his wife. Almost mad with fright*). Did you hear that?

WIFE. Hear what? What was it?

ZAMBI. Get upstairs and pack the bags!

WIFE. Joe, you're going crazy. I've never seen you

THE CLOAK OF EVIL

look like this before. (*He stares at her for a moment.*)

All right, I'll get ready.

[*She exits right. Zambi once more rushes to the window, he turns quickly to face the stranger who stands once more in the doorway left.*]

STRANGER. Still watching?

ZAMBI. What do you want? Get out of here?

STRANGER. Why? I think we're both looking for the same person. Let's wait for her together.

ZAMBI. I said get out of here. Can't you understand English?

STRANGER. You know, I think I saw her. I called to her, but she didn't seem to hear me. You see, she was coming one way, I the other. She disappeared in a bank of fog. I thought perhaps I'd better come back here to the Inn. There'll be no chance of losing her here. I'm so anxious to see her . . . aren't you?

ZAMBI. You're crazy, stark raving mad. I don't know what you're talking about. You're crazy, stark raving mad . . . crazy. Get out of here! Get out!

STRANGER (*paying no attention to the ravings of Zambi*). I wonder how she'll look? You know, it's been four years since I've seen her. She'll be older, of course. But she'll still have her jewels. She always put on her jewels when I came home. How long has she been living here? Does she do much of this night walking? She always was a great walker. You know, Mister, I had quite a time discovering which of these New England Inns she'd be at, but when I got to this one, I said, "This is it. Strange, isn't it? But I knew. . . ."

ZAMBI (*his eyes protruding, his hair mussed from nervous movements of his hands*). Are you going?

[*He removes his revolver.*]

STRANGER. Going? No, I'm going to wait.

[*Zambi fires two shots point blank at him. The stranger reels and staggers out the door. Zambi follows him,*]

THE CLOAK OF EVIL

and empties his gun offstage. A moment later he enters, nervous and distraught, his eyes bloodshot. He again goes to the window, sees nothing, starts to laugh. It is a low chuckle at first, then gradually goes through the various stages until it becomes hysterical. He suddenly stops, and throws the back of his hand across his mouth, for standing in the doorway is a tall black-gowned woman shrouded in green light. The stage lights dim down.

THE VOICE FROM THE TRUNK. Why do you stop laughing, Zambi? Hear! I am laughing. You didn't believe me, did you? Did you! Well, now listen to me laugh. It's death laughing, Zambi. Death! Feel how cold the room is. Not cold outside, but in. That's death, too.

[During this last speech, Zambi has slumped down limply along the side of the trunk, too paralyzed to even use his voice. The woman advances to where he is sitting, madly clasping the trunk. She towers above him. She kneels beside him, and when she comes up, the pearls and the bracelet are in her hand. Slowly and carefully she fastens the pearls about her neck. Puts on her bracelet and walks slowly out the door. A moment later the lights return. Travers and Darby rush in. They immediately notice Zambi collapsed on the floor, pistol in his hand, and staring dumbly ahead. Darby kneels beside him, and feels his pulse. He looks up at Travers.]

DARBY. He's not dead, but he's suffering from some kind of shock. He's the one that was doing the shooting though.

WIFE *(enters right. Stops. Then sees her husband)*.

Joe. . . . Joe. . . . *(She rushes to him.)* What happened, Doctor, is he dead?

DARBY. I don't know what's happened, Lady. I wish I did.

VOICE. I can tell you, Doctor.

TRAVERS. That's from the trunk. The dummy!

WIFE. Oh, my God.

THE CLOAK OF EVIL

[Travers throws open the lid and helps the Runt out.]

RUNT. He thought he shot me. But I was doubled up just the right way. I got a bullet in the knee. *(They help him over to the sofa.)* I'll have to talk fast, 'cause I think I'm going to do a flop!

DARBY. Go ahead.

RUNT *(turning toward Zambi)*. What about him?

DARBY. His mind's a blank. He doesn't know what's happening.

RUNT. Well, first of all I think *(He grimaces with pain and holds his knee.)* you better take a look outside. I think Zambi bumped off a guy. The guy said he was waitin' for a dame just like Zambi was, then Zambi let him have a slug or two. I was watchin' through the ventilation holes in the trunk. Zambi chased him outside.

DARBY. Travers, go out and have a look, will you? If what this fellow says is right, he should be lying on the lawn some place.

TRAVERS. Righto.

[He hurries offstage left.]

WIFE *(to her mute staring husband)*. Joe. . . . Joe, speak to me, can't you please, Joe?

[She keeps talking softly to him during the following conversation.]

DARBY. All right, let's have it.

RUNT. Well, Zambi makes me go out and dig up some woman who he says is his aunt. She was buried with some jewels. I get out there and dig her up, and I find she doesn't look dead. Then I see a guy watching me through the trees, I run back and give Zambi what jewels I got, and he claps me in the trunk. But I knew what was coming and I started to tell him about it, and he got sore. He let go a couple of slugs into the trunk, and I pretended they got me. Then this other fellow comes in, and I never heard Zambi talk so crazy in my life. Then a little later *(Travers enters left.)* I knew

THE CLOAK OF EVIL

she had come, cause Zambí couldn't talk any more, and I heard him scratching alongside the trunk. I think she got back her jewels, but you can see for sure. He had 'em in his pocket.

DARBY (*back to Travers*). Anything in his pocket, Travers?

[*Travers goes quickly to Zambí and helps his wife get him to his feet. He runs his hands around the ventriloquist's pockets.*]

TRAVERS. Not a thing, in the way of jewelry. (*Then to Zambí's wife.*) I'll help you get him upstairs.

WIFE. Leave him alone, can't you? Can't you see he needs me, now?

[*Travers shrugs.*]

DARBY. What did you find outside?

TRAVERS. Not a thing. Not one thing. The whole idea is preposterous.

DARBY. Maybe, Travers, but I wonder. Remember what I said earlier in the evening about things meshing together?

TRAVERS. Yes, but . . .

DARBY. There's one way we could find out. We can go out to that grave, and find out whether or not Mrs. Kester still has her jewels. (*To the Runt.*) You could identify the ones you took, couldn't you?

RUNT. I'll never forget 'em.

WIFE (*who by now has her dumb, mute husband to the door right*). Please, for God's sake, leave it alone. My husband is crazy; do you want me to go that same way? I don't want to know what really happened. Wait till I'm gone, won't you?

DARBY. Yes, of course. We'll wait. Of course, you realize I'll have to call the police. (*She looks at him, then continues her husband through the door right. Darby goes over to the window.*) Travers, I wonder if we were to go out to Mary Kester's grave . . .

TRAVERS. Yes. . . .

THE CLOAK OF EVIL

DABBY. Do you suppose we might find two people in it:
Mary and her husband?

TRAVERS. I wonder. . . .

Curtain

FREDERICK
By
MARION L. TALLMAN

Copyright, 1940, by Samuel French.

CAST

FREDERICK RUTLEDGE CARSON, *the man with the double life.*

EMMETT MASTERS, *a friend in need.*

BETSY CARSON, *a troublesome young sister.*

MRS. CARSON, *an understanding mother.*

MR. CARSON, *a determined father.*

SALLY JONES, *Emmett's friend.*

MARTIE REYNOLDS, *fresh from a year in Europe.*

MR. PAUL DOUGLAS, *from Hollywood.*

THE PLACE. The cellar of the Carson home.

THE TIME. Two autumn days.

FREDERICK

Setting: A corner of the cellar, unpainted board walls, stairway to kitchen at left, door to yard at right, rickety table in front center stage, straight chair behind table, another on right, old couch or settee against right wall, large wooden chest or old trunk in center of back wall, and rocking chair left center. Pictures of athletes pinned or tacked to rear wall, on reverse sides are pasted pictures of actors and actresses.

Frederick and Emmett are boxing left center as curtain rises. Frederick strikes Emmett on the chin.

EMMETT. Remember my glasses.

FREDERICK. Sure, never forgot them yet.

[They pause to rest. Frederick sits on corner of front table. Emmett drops into rocking chair. They are both about sixteen and dressed in long trousers and sweaters. Frederick is taller and handsome; Emmett is inclined to be slight.]

EMMETT. Boy, how I wish I were you. On the football varsity and a game coming Friday. If there's anything that makes a man of a fellow, it's playing football.

FREDERICK. Shucks, that's what you think. I'd just as soon use my spare time in some other way.

EMMETT. Well, you'll have to admit kicking a ball around catches the girls' fancies.

FREDERICK (*picks up book*). Let's drop the girls. Say, have you read this book, "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde"? It's old but it's got something. No women, no sports, just men — men that are men! You know the plot. Dr. Jekyll, by drinking a potion he discovered, became a beast known as Mr. Hyde. And his friend was faced

FREDERICK

with the problem of saving Dr. Jekyll from the consequences of his crimes. Some plot! (*Pauses, looks searchingly at Emmett.*) Emmett, old man, you're a good friend of mine, aren't you?

EMMETT. Huh! Oh, sure.

FREDERICK. Say, Emmett, what would you say if I turned out to be a Mr. Hyde?

EMMETT. Huh? (*Lazily.*) Huh! (*Jumping up and sticking out his head as his eyes widen.*) Huh! (*Disgustedly, as he sinks back into chair.*) Don't kill me, Fred; I'd die laughing.

FREDERICK. Seriously. . . .

EMMETT. Hah! You a Mr. Hyde! Why, you aren't a Jekyll yet. You're just Frederick Rutledge Carson, the football star of Boling High School. You can't fool me!

FREDERICK. I know, but just suppose I wasn't what I seemed. Would you stick by me?

EMMETT. Huh! (*Drowsily.*) Oh, yeah! Sure I'd stick. Now, let's go back to something vital. The new girl's a wow. Name's Martie. She's just come back from a trip abroad and is staying for a few weeks with Sally. Boy, wait'll you see her. (*Gets up.*) She walks like Greta Garbo (*Struts around with hand on hip.*) talks like Judy Garland. (*Mimics her.*) "Oh, yes, indeed, I loved Europe," and looks like Deanna Durbin. (*Sighs.*) Boy, I sure wish she'd fall for me (*Sinks in rocking chair.*) but as usual, it'll be you she rolls those eyes at. And you can't stand girls! (*Sighs.*) Well, anyway, I got Sally.

FREDERICK. Yes, you've got Sally. And I've got a pain from listening to you. (*Picks up book again and settles in chair behind table. He reads a minute while Emmett yawns and stretches himself. Emmett starts to whistle lazily. Suddenly.*) Hey, look at me. Do I look any different? Am I changing?

EMMETT (*jumping out of chair and tripping over his*

FREDERICK

feet). Huh! (*He peers fearfully into Frederick's face, goes up closer, backs away still looking, and then lowers himself wearily into rocking chair*). No. (*Resumes whistling, suddenly stops and leans toward Frederick*.) Hey, what's got into you? What did you mean about having changed? Are you nuts?

FREDERICK. Now, see here, old man. Everything's all right. (*Sighs*.) You wouldn't understand.

[*He continues reading, leans back in chair, and rests feet on table*.

EMMETT (*whistles for a time*). If you're going to read all afternoon, I'm going to look up Sally. (*No answer from Frederick. Emmett waits, climbs out of chair, ambles to door, turns*.) S'long, Dr. Jekyll.

[*Exits right*.

FREDERICK. S'long.

[*Reads on; whistling dies away. Silence. Finally down the stairs tiptoes Betsy. She wears a hair ribbon, short, childish dress, and socks, and is about ten years old. She holds one hand behind her back and, from the left, comes directly behind Frederick. She slowly raises hand and shakes out a long, villain's mustache. She secures it carefully in each hand and suddenly lowers it over Frederick's head and sticks it above his lip. Frederick jumps up, dropping book, and lunges after Betsy who reaches stairs left and puts finger on lip as she turns*.

BETSY. Shhhhhhhhhhh — touch me and I'll call Mom.

And — I'll — tell — her!

FREDERICK (*startled*). Tell her what? Where did you get this? Where — did — you — get — this? (*He pulls off mustache. Hisses*.) Where did you — get — this? What do you know?

BETSY (*clasps hands and then speaks with a dramatic sweep of her arms*). Everything!

[*She runs up stairs and exits left*.

FREDERICK. How did she find out? And where did she get this? Darn kid sisters, anyhow.

FREDERICK

[Strokes mustache lovingly, listens a moment, tiptoes up stairs left, locks door that is offstage, crosses room, locks other door, smiles. He then goes to each picture on wall and turns them over to disclose the actors' pictures. He takes key from pocket, unlocks chest, takes from it makeup mirror, two pincer clothes pins, and ball of string, and brings them to table. He walks over to Clark Gable's picture, takes it down, brings it to table where he sits facing the audience and peers at picture, then at self in mirror. He tries to make wrinkles in forehead by holding them. He nods approval, ties one end of string to one clothes pin, snaps it gently to ear, clips other pin to other ear, draws string across under nose, and ties it to the second pin, which pulls his ears perpendicular to his head. He then ties three strings around wrinkles on forehead. He surveys self in mirror. He goes to chest and takes out book, and standing behind table reads title page.]

FREDERICK (reading). "How to Get to Hollywood in Ten Lessons" by I. Wouldn't Go. (*Turns pages.*) Lesson I: How to Breathe. (*Turns pages.*) Lesson II: How to Sit. (*Turns pages.*) Lesson III: How to Walk. (*Repeats dreamily.*) How to walk. That's next. How — to — walk. (*Reads.*) To act, one must teach oneself to walk as only those who live in Hollywood can walk. One can do this by practising these twenty simple exercises. Step I: To gain poise and dignity one must first feel like a prince. Say ten times to oneself, "I am a prince." (*He thinks for a moment, lays book on table, steps to front left, and repeats.*) "I am a prince." (*He does this ten times, each time raising chest, shoulders, chin higher until he is standing on tiptoes. At end he collapses and droops on table for support. He hangs over book, reading.*) Step II: To gain ease, one must now walk around in the following manner until the process seems as natural as your usual walk. Droop the shoulders as far for-

FREDERICK

ward as possible letting the hands hang forward, then throw the shoulders back and at the same time stretching the arms backward, and while doing this, walk around and around your room. Try it now. (*Frederick frowns, rereads passage very slowly and painstakingly, then proceeds to walk around in above manner. On second time he collapses in rocking chair. At length he adjusts clothes pins and wrinkle strings, and limps back to table, leans over book, and reads.*)

Step III: Place book on head and walk around room and up and down stairs. (*He breaks off long length of string and lays it in book to keep place, places book on head, and walks right around table to stairs and up and down them, and back to table; repeats. On reaching table second time, he opens book and reads.*) Step IV: Combine the three first steps in this manner: Say, "I am a prince," place book on head, then walk around room letting shoulders and arms droop forward and then throwing arms and shoulders back. On every back throw say, "I am a prince."

[*Frederick walks around the room in this manner, and has just reached table when a knock is heard at door right. He stops in horror, book slips to floor, he rests on table, and in rasping voice speaks.*]

FREDERICK. Who's there?

EMMETT (*offstage*). Hey, open up! I've got news! There's gonna be a dance.

FREDERICK (*in relief*). O.K., wait a sec'.

[*He scoops up book, mirror, string, and bundles them in chest, lowers lid; then forgetting clothes pins, goes to door and unlocks and opens it.*]

EMMETT (*brushing past without looking at Frederick*).

Hey, guess what! (*Turns and sees pins.*) Awk! (*Sinks dazed into rocking chair.*) Say, what're you trying to do to yourself — turn into a donkey? Aren't your ears big enough without stretching them so they'll flap? What — is — the — matter — with — you?

FREDERICK

FREDERICK (*right center, unbuckling pins and untying strings*). It's like this — say, remember Mr. Hyde — and your promise that you'd be my friend?

EMMETT. Sure, I'll stick, but break the news gradual.

FREDERICK. Well, I've been meaning to let you in for some time. (*Taking deep breath.*) It's like this. (*Hastily.*) I've got to go to Hollywood. I've-got-to-go-to-Hollywood.

EMMETT. Hollywood! (*Alarmed.*) Hollywood! Say, have you lost your mind? Have you got a fever or anything? Does your mother know?

FREDERICK. Oh, shut up! Of course, she doesn't know, and I haven't a fever! It's like this. I've wanted to be an actor since I was a kid — not a silly amateur, high-school actor, but a real one. Live in California, take leading parts in plays, have everyone in town turn out to see Frederick Rutledge Carson in his latest triumph! That's the life!

EMMETT (*leaning forward and watching Frederick with changing emotions, grins, then turns serious*). T'heck, I believe the boy's serious.

FREDERICK. Serious! I never was serious about anything else.

EMMETT. But football and basketball: they're what matters.

FREDERICK. Not to me they don't. I tell you I'm Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde over again. I play football. I play basketball. What for? Because I want to? No! Because you, the family, the school see my brawn and decide I should play. That's what I do when my friends see me. But by myself (*Thoughtfully.*) —that's different. I'm the actor; sometimes I'm Rooney, not often because he's too young; sometimes I'm Tyrone Power, but he is a little young, too; and then I'm always coming back to Clark Gable. That's my ideal, a man of experience, of suavity. Boy, that's me, Fred-

FREDERICK

erick Rutledge Carson, the experienced man of the metropolises — or is it metropoli?

EMMETT. That's it! You were trying to make yourself look like Gable. Oh man, have you got what you've got bad!

FREDERICK. Yeah — but what's that to you? (*Angrily.*) You don't want to go to Hollywood. You don't want to be famous. You don't want to act. All you think of is Sally or some other silly girl in this forgotten corner of the world.

EMMETT (*rising, and coming to center table*). Can it! As long as you've told me what the secret is, let me in on the rest of it.

FREDERICK (*brightening*). Well, it's like this. I've been collecting everything I could about acting, and practising all the time I could get away from the family and that sister of mine. (*Suddenly.*) You know, I think she suspects!

EMMETT (*troubled*). No-o-o-o-o.

FREDERICK. Yeah. Say, would you like to go over my things? Only take you a minute.

EMMETT. Sure.

FREDERICK (*going to chest and opening it. Emmett follows*). Here's my greatest help, "How to Get to Hollywood" by I. Wouldn't Go. Great ideas, that man, Go. And here's my makeup box, professional, and did I scrimp on allowance and mow lawns for this!

[*Takes out box and sets it on floor. Betsy slips in door right and settles herself on floor to listen, partly hidden by corner of settee and blanket.*]

EMMETT (*bending over chest*). T'heck! What's this girl's dress and curly wig doing in here?

FREDERICK. Oh, that's just my female disguise. (*Pompously.*) I believe that the greatest test of an actor's skill is being able to impersonate the opposite sex.

EMMETT. How'd you get them?

FREDERICK

FREDERICK. Bought the wig and found the dress in the Goodwill bag at my aunt's. Knew she wouldn't mind; so I borrowed it permanently.

EMMETT. Swell. (*Taking up makeup kit.*) I've always wanted to fool with this stuff. Ever make a false nose?

FREDERICK. Sure, let's try!

EMMETT (*placing box on center table and pulling chair up to table right center*). Oh, man.

FREDERICK (*sits behind table, opens box, digs around, and brings up can of nose putty. Hands piece to Emmett*). There; now roll it around in your hands until it becomes soft enough to mould easily.

[*Betsy sticks head from hiding place.*]

EMMETT (*rolls piece, then sticks it on nose, pulls mirror from box, props it up, and proceeds to mold nose*). Hollywood, here I come!

[*Frederick does the same.*]

BETSY. Don't you think you need help?

[*Getting up. Frederick and Emmett swing around.*]

FREDERICK (*regaining voice*). Of all the — how did you get in here? How much did you hear? Answer me!

BETSY. Through the door. Everything!

EMMETT (*pulling off pieces of nose*). If you ever tell you saw me doing this, I'll scalp you — scalp every last hair from that head of yours.

FREDERICK. And I'll cut your ears off! Do — you — hear?

BETSY. Sure, that's all right. I'm not telling. But could you spare a dime — between you? Yes? No?

FREDERICK. No!

BETSY. And you, Emmett? Just a dime? Yes? No?

EMMETT. No! I'd give it to you if I had it but . . .

BETSY. Oh, that's all right; I'll just charge it. Twenty cents to Emmett and Frederick. Anyway, I'd rather stay here and watch!

FREDERICK

FREDERICK. Watch? You watch? (*Starting to get up.*) This is my room. Get out! Or . . .

BETSY (*edging toward door right*). Don't threaten, or I'll tell Mom! And Pop! And you owe me twenty cents.

[*Exits right.*]

EMMETT. T'heck! I knew nothing good would come of living a double life.

[*Sighs.*]

FREDERICK (*removes nose, packs up materials, and closes box. Replaces it in chest, locks chest, and turns over pictures on wall*). You're right. I've had one narrow escape after another ever since I chose my life's work. (*Brightly.*) But even Edison was laughed at. Just give me time and I'll show 'em. (*Slaps Emmett on back.*) Come on, let's go down to the field and watch practise. (*Starts for door right.*) Maybe you'll pick up Sally on the way.

EMMETT (*brightening*). Maybe.

[*He gets up and follows Frederick. Both exit.*]

FREDERICK (*offstage*). Say, wait a minute; I forgot to unlock the kitchen door.

[*Dashes in, up stairs, unlocks door, and runs out right. Quiet. Finally sounds of a man's and woman's voices and footsteps are heard offstage above or at left stairs. Mrs. Carson precedes Mr. Carson down the stairs. She is a woman of about forty, modish, and wears a becoming afternoon dress. Mr. Carson is about forty-five, determined in manner, and wears a business suit.*]

MRS. CARSON. But, John, I'm worried about the boy. He's having the most dreadful nightmares and talking in his sleep.

[*Below table.*]

MR. CARSON (*left of Mrs. Carson*). Nonsense, everyone has a nightmare or two in his life, and I suppose we've all done our share of talking, too. Don't worry; he's

FREDERICK

too normal, too healthy to worry about. He's a football player, just as his dad was at his age.

MRS. CARSON. Yes, I know. If he only talked about football or school or his friends, in his sleep, but he doesn't.

MR. CARSON. He doesn't? Well, what else could he say?

MRS. CARSON. Hollywood!

MR. CARSON. Hollywood!

MRS. CARSON. Yes, Hollywood! And usually something to the effect of "Hollywood, here I come!"

MR. CARSON. This is serious! How long has he been like this?

MRS. CARSON. For months, but he seems to be having the dreams much more frequently lately.

BETSY (*appearing at head of stairs*). Hello.

MRS. CARSON. Hello, dear. Just get in?

BETSY. Yes'm. Pop, can I have a dime?

MR. CARSON. No!

BETSY. What're you doing down here?

[*Coming down stairs.*]

MRS. CARSON. Can you keep a secret?

BETSY. Can I? Oh man, can I?

MR. CARSON. Betsy, such slang!

BETSY. Oh, well, I can keep a secret. (*Aside.*) And how! (*Aloud.*) What's this one?

MRS. CARSON. About Frederick's birthday. We're getting him a complete tool kit and bench. He likes being down here so much that your dad and I decided to give him something to do and work with this winter.

BETSY. Yes, I see! A set of tools to work with. (*Thoughtfully.*) A — set — of — tools — to — keep — him — busy! Wow! That's somethin'.

MR. CARSON. And your mother wanted me to see where the bench could set.

BETSY. A work bench and tools! (*Hastily.*) He wouldn't like that.

MR. CARSON. What? What did you say, young lady?

FREDERICK

BETSY (*staunchly*). I said he wouldn't like that.

MR. CARSON. How do you know what your brother likes?

He's a boy. You don't understand that all men like machinery, tools, hunting, sports — basketball, football.

BETSY (*teetering back and forth*). Uh-huh, but not Frederick.

MR. CARSON. What do you mean — "Not Frederick"?

Helen, I'm beginning to think we have not one but two children to worry about. Here's Betsy, the baby, telling us how to bring up Frederick.

MRS. CARSON. Betsy, don't let yourself get into another of those contrary moods. Remember, I've told you to say what you mean, not talk in riddles. Tell your father why Frederick wouldn't like a work bench.

BETSY (*sulking*). Must I?

MR. CARSON. Answer your mother.

BETSY. Well, don't blame me if Fred leaves home.

MR. AND MRS. CARSON. What?

BETSY. Well, he — he — Oh, I won't tell. It ain't square.

MR. CARSON. Don't say "ain't."

BETSY. Well, it ain't.

MR. CARSON. Do as your mother asked you to. Why — doesn't — Fred — want — a — work — bench?

BETSY (*taking a deep breath*). Because — because — he doesn't.

MRS. CARSON (*warningly*). Betsy!

BETSY. Well, he wouldn't use it! (*Gulps.*) Pop would be using it all the time. Fred doesn't want it; Pop does.

MR. CARSON (*about to explode*). Young lady!

MRS. CARSON. Now, now, John. We made her say it.

MR. CARSON. We'll drop the subject. Say no more about it. (*Mrs. Carson wanders over to settee and straightens blanket; she rocks chair back and forth and examines paint on it. Mr. Carson looks around the room, strokes chin, and finally walks to chest; he seems*

FREDERICK

surprised to see padlock. Betsy sinks weakly into chair behind table. She rests her elbows on table, and her head on hands, and listens meekly to parents as she looks at audience.) I wonder why the boy wants this antique in the cellar. You'd think he'd want a desk or bench here. And he keeps it locked.

MRS. CARSON (*coming over to left of him*). Yes, I've rather hinted about getting rid of it, but Frederick always seems offended. I don't mind his keeping it locked. I remember when I was a girl, my aunt would never let me own a thing that she didn't know about. Of course her intentions were good, but I did long for something that was definitely and secretly my own. I wouldn't for the world look inside unless Frederick asked me to, but naturally, I couldn't make him understand that without making him think I was hurt by his not wanting me to know what he keeps there. I really am glad he has something he treasures enough to take care of.

[Betsy rolls eyes and looks very wise.]

MR. CARSON. Perhaps you're right, Helen. A boy has just as much right to privacy as an adult. (*Mrs. Carson examines the pictures on left rear wall. Mr. Carson follows her and takes hold of one to examine it more closely.*) I like his choice of pictures. They show he's interested in the right type of people.

[Betsy chokes aloud.]

MRS. CARSON (*whirling around*). Betsy, did you choke? Are you ill? Hadn't you better get a drink of water?

BETSY. I guess so.

[She gets up slowly and starts for stairs, trying to hold back her laughter.]

MRS. CARSON. It does seem as though our children do the strangest things; but then there's no use worrying about Betsy when we have Frederick on our minds.

MR. CARSON. Yes, but on the whole I feel our children are no worse than other people's, Helen. (*Betsy exits*)

FREDERICK

with a satisfied nod; Mr. Carson comes down to table. Mrs. Carson looks closely at picture again on left rear wall.) Helen, did I tell you that I ran into Paul Douglas while I was in New York?

MRS. CARSON. You don't mean Paul Douglas?

[She whirls around.]

MR. CARSON. Yes, Paul Douglas, himself.

MRS. CARSON. What did he have to say? *(Coming downstage.)* You know, it seems years since we were going on picnics with him and the rest of our high school friends. Why hasn't he written to any of us in all this time? *(She sits in rocking chair.)* Why, it must be twenty years since we have known anything about him.

MR. CARSON. Yes, it has been a long time. *(Sits in chair above table.)* He's a good scout and hasn't changed at all; hair's a little greyer and possibly he's stouter, more pompous, but he has the same twinkle and grin.

MRS. CARSON. Don't tell me he is still handsome. I can remember how all of us girls thought he was the handsomest boy in school. How thrilled we were when he condescended to take one of us to a dance. What has he been doing all these years?

MR. CARSON. You'd never guess! He — is — in — Hollywood.

MRS. CARSON. Hollywood! Why, he can't be an actor; I'd have seen him in plays if he did acting.

MR. CARSON. No, he's in the production business; even acts as a talent scout on his off moments. You know, he says they find the best material for leading men and women by accident rather than among the Hollywood struck young people who flock to the studios.

MRS. CARSON. How long is he going to be East?

MR. CARSON. About two months; he said he was on his first vacation in five years. I gathered he had a most responsible position. You know, he got to talking

FREDERICK

about the difficulty studios have in finding competent actors that are young enough to warrant extensive studio training.

MRS. CARSON. Not really; I'd always thought it was just the other way — supply was greater than demand.

MR. CARSON. You'd think so, but not according to Paul. Right now he's keeping his eyes open for girls not over eleven who can be trained to be foreign aristocrats. (*Rises.*) And by the way, I suggested that he come up here for a few days. I told him we couldn't offer him any glamorous experiences but he could get plenty of sleep and good food. He seemed quite taken with the idea.

MRS. CARSON. Oh, I'm so glad; (*Rises.*) Betsy will be so thrilled to see anyone who has actually been to Hollywood. John (*Lays hand on his arm.*), let's not tell the children anything about his coming. We'll surprise them.

MR. CARSON. Fine; suppose I drop Paul a wire and tell him we'll expect him next Saturday, if he can make his plans accordingly.

MRS. CARSON. Of course.

[They start toward stairs.]

MR. CARSON. I suppose I'd better let Frederick's birthday present drift for a while; I don't like the way Betsy acted about it.

[They both exit up stairs. Quiet for a brief moment. Then from the right comes a babble of voices and laughter. Finally, Sally and Martie followed by Emmett and Frederick enter right. Sally is a wholesome girl of fifteen with her hair simply done and wearing a simple sport dress. Martie is about the same age but decidedly cute. Her hair is curled elaborately, her dress is fluffy, her stockings sheer, and her shoes high-heeled. She is very affected in all that she says and does.]

FREDERICK. That practice was short and sweet. Have a seat, everyone. This is my hangout.

FREDERICK

MARTIE. Isn't it too, too darling!

[*She walks around inspecting walls and furniture.*]

FREDERICK. Huh?

[*He sits on stairs leading left.*]

MARTIE. I said, "Isn't it too, too darling."

FREDERICK. Oh, yeah. Darling.

SALLY (*sits on settee, Emmett sits at her left, but watches Martie with fascination*). Yes, I've liked it here. The whole gang come here on rainy days. Believe it or not, but we even invented a game called cellar tennis. The best thing we did was to hit someone with the racket. The ball bounced so, we couldn't begin to hit that.

MARTIE. You play tennis? (*Above table.*) I have the loveliest tennis dress. Everyone says I look just like Claudette Colbert when I have it on. It really is most becoming.

FREDERICK (*he looks at her with undisguised amusement*). I know it is. (*Finally he sits up straighter and never takes his eyes from her; he appears to be studying every motion she makes and every inflection of her voice.*) Tell us what you did when you were abroad.

[*He leans forward to observe her reaction.*]

MARTIE. Oh, so many, many things. We bought dresses, just oodles of dresses in Paris. We strolled where really smart, smart people stroll; we rode a great deal; we went to the theatre. We did everything that the right people do. You know, being abroad is an education in itself.

[*She stands in center stage, and with affected gestures and enunciation speaks especially to Frederick.*]

FREDERICK. Oh, yes, I know. Tell us more.

[*He purses out his mouth and leans back to watch her better.*]

MARTIE (*smiling affectedly*). Yes, I knew you'd know.

EMMETT (*his hopeless expression intensifies as he watches Frederick's increasing interest.*) Oh, shucks.

SALLY (*turning to him*). What did you say, Emmett?

FREDERICK

EMMETT. Nothing.

FREDERICK. Go on, Martie. Don't mind him. Tell us what else you saw in Europe.

MARTIE. Oh, so many, many things that it is hard to tell all of them. Oh, yes, I remember now. The flowers were beautiful.

SALLY. Flowers? Where were they?

MARTIE. Where? Oh, I went so many, many places I really can't remember just where they were. You know how it is, don't you, Frederick? When one travels so extensively it is most, most impossible to remember where everything was.

FREDERICK. Me, sure. I know.

[He leans his elbow on knee and chin on elbow as he continues to observe. Occasionally he imitates a gesture or tries to frame a word with his mouth as Martie has pronounced it.]

EMMETT. How? You've never been more than a hundred miles from home.

SALLY. Shush. Go on, Martie, tell us about the flowers.

FREDERICK. Oh, yes. Do.

[Slightly in imitation of Martie.]

MARTIE *(she walks around stage and indicates on floor the location of the various flower beds)*. Oh, there were pink flowers here. *(She points to left downstage in front of Frederick, and turning swiftly she walks up-stage to the left corner.)* And here there were blue flowers.

SALLY. Blue flowers? What kind?

MARTIE *(swinging gracefully toward her)*. Kind? Oh, really, I wouldn't know. *(She turns to Frederick.)* You know how hard it is for one who travels to remember kinds, don't you?

FREDERICK. Oh, yes, indeedy.

EMMETT. I knew it. He's the lucky man.

[To Sally.]

SALLY. Hush. Go on, Martie.

FREDERICK

MARTIE. And over here (*She sweeps to right rear corner.*) are the dearest little green flowers.

FREDERICK. My cow, green?

MARTIE. What did you say?

FREDERICK (*hastily*). Nothing, I just remarked they must have been beautiful.

EMMETT. Huh?

MARTIE (*walking to front right*). And here were the dearest little flowers one ever saw. Such tiny, tiny yellow posies.

FREDERICK. No, not posies. Not really posies!

MARTIE. Yes, real posies. And they were the loveliest pale orchid.

EMMETT. I thought you said yel . . .

SALLY. Shhhhhhhh. . . .

FREDERICK. Do tell us more about the lovely posies.

MARTIE. I'd love to; but you know one talks so much better when one is alone with one who understands.

FREDERICK. Yes, I know. Who better? May I take you to the dance tonight?

MARTIE. Of course, dear boy. I'd love to talk with you and you alone.

EMMETT. "Dear boy," and he doesn't like girls. Say, Sally, are ya comin' to the dance with me? I've got to take someone.

SALLY. Sure, but it's most three and I've got to help Mom. Come on, Martie, and let's do a little exercising at home.

[*Rises and starts to door right.*]

MARTIE. Oh, yes, indeed. I must try on the new gown that I'm to wear tonight. (*To Frederick.*) It's pale aquamarine, you know.

FREDERICK. Ah, yes, I know.

[*He is still staring fascinated at Martie. He now rises and follows girls to door. Sally exits, followed by Martie; Emmett rises and starts to follow.*]

MARTIE. Bye-bye, Fred-erick.

FREDERICK

[She exits too, too gracefully.]

FREDERICK. Bye-bye, Mar-tie.

SALLY (offstage). See you tonight.

EMMETT. Yeah.

FREDERICK (in a whisper). Hey, Emmett, stay a while.

EMMETT. Not with you, you woman-hater.

FREDERICK (taking Emmett by the arm). Oh, can it.

I've got to have help before I forget how she does it.

Boy, was she a type to test the skill of any actor. Here, help me.

EMMETT. Huh? You mean you were interested in her type and not in her? (Frederick nods.) Man, maybe I'll interest her yet. (He adjusts glasses.) Sure, I'll help.

[Frederick, followed by Emmett, goes to chest and takes out the following articles and hands them to Emmett who carries them to center table and lays them there: makeup box, mirror, wig, slippers, stockings, dress, slip, round garters.]

FREDERICK. Now, let's work fast. I've got to get her type in mind before the inspiration is gone. Here, help me with the slip; I guess it's called a slip, and the dress.

[He comes below chair left of table, takes off sweater and tosses it on the settee, takes off tie and shirt and tosses them to settee. Then with the help of Emmett steps into slip as if it were trousers, and pulls it up. After adjusting it, Emmett very carefully lowers dress over Frederick's head. They fasten side opening and neck with great care and adjust belt. The dress should be modish, and fit well. Emmett then stands back to get the effect of their work. Emmett walks to left downstage.]

FREDERICK. How does it look to you?

EMMETT. Man, with a wig, no one would guess you were anyone but a girl. And, man, are you going to be pretty. Wow!

FREDERICK. That's enough from you. Here, help me get my feet ready.

FREDERICK

[He sits in chair right of table, and takes off his shoes and socks. Emmett takes stockings from table and rolls one up at a time in preparation for slipping them on. He hands the roll to Frederick who, with all the care possible, slips them on.]

EMMETT (*taking garters from the table*). Hey, how in blazes did you get these?

FREDERICK. I hate to tell you but I bought them. The clerk looked so funny; I told her they were for my mother, and then she looked funnier than ever.

EMMETT (*laughing*). Say, wouldn't I like to see the face of coach if I told him you were buying ladies' garters.

FREDERICK. If you ever do, glasses or no glasses, I'll knock you flat.

EMMETT. Oh, keep still. I'm keeping still. Here, slip these on and you won't feel so tough.

[He hands garters to Frederick.]

FREDERICK (*adjusting garters and rolling up pants legs*).

There, now for the finishing touch. (*Takes slippers from table.*) The shoes I bought at a rummage sale, so you don't have to ask about them.

[He puts on slippers and stands up.]

EMMETT (*sitting back on heels*). There, Cinderella, you're almost ready for the ball.

[Frederick takes a few experimental steps to left, and then seats himself behind table, where he opens makeup box, props up mirror, and looks himself carefully in the face.]

FREDERICK. I think I have a long, oval face, don't you?

EMMETT (*coming behind Frederick, and peering into reflection in mirror*). Huh? Who cares what shape it is?

FREDERICK. It's easy to see you've never made a study of makeup. The first thing you must consider before applying rouge is contour of the face.

EMMETT. Oh, yeah? Well, I'd say you could discover

FREDERICK

the so-called contour better if you put on your wig and saw what that did to you.

FREDERICK. Yeah, maybe you're right. Let me have it.

[He puts on wig, and Emmett very carefully adjusts it and pins stray locks with hairpins from makeup box. The finished result should not be funny but realistic.]

EMMETT *(coming left below table, and turning back on audience, stands with hand on hip, and looks at his masterpiece. Finally he starts back)*. It's very good, but I'm sure this curl would look better higher. It will improve the contour.

[He mimics a girl.]

FREDERICK *(pushing him aside)*. I like the contour as it is. Now for the rouge. *(Suddenly.)* Say, Emmett, look; don't you think it's heartshaped now?

EMMETT *(peers in glass and answers very seriously)*. Yeah, the wig did do something to you. Where do you put the rouge on a heart?

FREDERICK. Darned if I know. Well, let's not bother. We'll just put it anywhere it looks good.

[He takes rouge, lipstick, and powder, and with utmost concentration applies them.]

EMMETT *(watches silently. When Frederick is finished, he sinks in rocking chair in amazement. Finally)*. Say, Frederick, do you know that makeup really is good! If I hadn't seen you do it, I'd swear you were a girl and the same type as Martie. *(Suddenly getting up and mincing over to Frederick's left.)* May I have this dance with you, Miss Durbin?

[He puts hand on hip.]

FREDERICK *(rising and slipping his hand coyly into Emmett's arm)*. I'd love to dance with you, dear Mr. Masters. *(In an affected, girlish tone. They walk around table to right, and then take one or two waltz steps below table. Frederick suddenly.)* Here, we've got to get to work. Help me put these things away. *(They clear table and put box, etc., in chest. Emmett*

FREDERICK

tosses Frederick's shirt, sweater, shoes, and socks into chest.) Now, at last I'm ready. You pretend you're the audience and sit over there. (*Indicating the settee.*) You see if you can pick flaws with my imitation. You know, a good friend is one who helps by criticizing as well as by praising.

EMMETT. Sure.

FREDERICK (*walking to left downstage; he imitates Martie's walk, enunciation, gestures, to the best of his ability.*) Here was a lovely, lovely little flower bed filled with the dearest little, little pale pink flowers. They were so sweet. (*He bends over to smell a flower. Standing.*) Ah, could anything be sweeter to one who has traveled so, so, so far? (*Mrs. Carson, followed by Betsy, appears at the top of the stairs. They stand absolutely quiet and amazed, unnoticed by Frederick and Emmett. Frederick walks across front of stage, and waving his hand to indicate flowers.*) And here we have the dearest of them all, blue, blue forget-me-nots.

MRS. CARSON. Pardon me, Emmett, have you seen Frederick anywhere?

[*Emmett jumps up and Frederick springs around to face the two on stairs. They are so horrified that neither can speak for a moment.*]

EMMETT. Oh, no, no, ma'am. I haven't seen Frederick.

FREDERICK. Oh, no, I haven't seen him either.

MRS. CARSON (*coming down the stairs*). And, Emmett, won't you introduce me to your new friend? (*Advancing to Frederick, who backs away to right.*) You must be Martie Reynolds who is visiting Sally, aren't you?

EMMETT. Oh, yes, ma'am, she's Martie Reynolds. Mrs. Carson, this is Martie Reynolds.

FREDERICK (*stepping forward and regaining his composure*). How do you do, dear Mrs. Carson. I've heard Frederick say so much about you that I feel I know you already.

FREDERICK

MRS. CARSON. How nice. And I hear that you just arrived from a long trip abroad.

FREDERICK. Oh, dear me, yes. As I told Frederick this afternoon, one never tires of talking of one's travels, does one?

MRS. CARSON. No, one doesn't. (*Brightly.*) I suppose you are going to the dance tonight with the rest of the boys and girls.

FREDERICK. Oh, yes, indeed, I'm going with your son, Frederick.

MRS. CARSON. How nice, Frederick hadn't told me.

BETSY (*coming down stairs and advancing toward Frederick*). Did you say your name was Martie Reynolds?

[*Emmett edges above table and slightly behind Mrs. Carson, who is below chair right of table; Frederick is at her right and Betsy at her left.*]

FREDERICK (*patiently*). Yes, dear, Martie Reynolds.

EMMETT (*shaking fist at Betsy and putting finger to lip*). Shhhhhh.

MRS. CARSON (*turning around suddenly*). Did you say something, Emmett?

EMMETT. Oh, no, ma'am. I just said it was warm in here.

MRS. CARSON. Yes, isn't it? Don't you think it would be better to open the outside door.

FREDERICK. Oh, I don't mind the air a bit, do you, Betsy, dear?

BETSY. My, you've grown some since this morning, haven't you?

MRS. CARSON. Why, Betsy. (*To Frederick.*) Betsy gets the strangest notions. Well, I must run along. I'm sure I'll see you often, Martie. And, Emmett, will you tell Frederick that I'd like him to go on an errand for me before supper.

[*She exits on stairs.*]

BETSY. Martie, my sock.

[*Emmett drops on settee.*]

FREDERICK

FREDERICK (*sinking into chair right of table*). What if she had guessed! (*Suddenly.*) Say, do you think she was really fooled, or do you think she was putting on an act? You know, you can't always tell about mothers; they're rather deep sometimes.

EMMETT. Sure, you fooled her. She never had an inkling that you weren't Martie. Say, what're you going to do when she sees the real Martie?

BETSY. He'll probably try to tell Mom, the first Martie was a twin or something. You know, though, I think she was fooled too. Maybe you aren't so bad an actor as I thought you were. Mom ain't so dumb.

FREDERICK (*springing suddenly from chair*). Say, that was a test. If you can fool your own family with your impersonations, you must be acting with realism and art. Say, Emmett, perhaps Hollywood is nearer than I thought. (*Dramatically.*) Hollywood, here I come!

[*Emmett is sitting on settee; Betsy is standing down stage left gazing in admiration at Frederick who is standing down from the center table.*]

BETSY (*very slowly and thoughtfully*). Have you got a dime?

FREDERICK. Yes.

[*Pulling up dress, and reaching for pocket.*]

EMMETT. Sure.

[*He reaches for pocket.*]

BETSY. You — you — have! Well, I guess I don't want it. (*Slowly.*) Frederick, when you get to Hollywood, can I come to see you sometimes?

FREDERICK. Sure, maybe you'll be a great actress long after I've become the world's greatest actor, the world's greatest dramatic actor. (*Dramatically.*) The greatest Shakespearian actor the centuries have ever known. The one who has made Hamlet live again!

BETSY (*dryly*). Guess you'd better stick to girls.

FREDERICK. Oh, yeah!

[*He turns threateningly toward Betsy, who exits left.*]

FREDERICK

EMMETT. I can't get over it. You fool your mother.

FREDERICK. Yeah, it was a joke. Well, you gotta help me out of this before I have to fool someone else. (*He sits in chair right of table and takes off shoes and stockings, and tosses stockings to Emmett. Emmett shakes out stockings carefully from his position on settee and rolls them carefully into a ball. He replaces shoes and stockings in chest. Frederick removes wig and Emmett carries that to chest as he brings and puts on table makeup box and mirror. As Frederick stands down from center table and begins to take off dress, Mrs. Carson opens door left and starts down stairs. She looks at Frederick as she opens her mouth to speak, stares as if horrified, and then tiptoes carefully up stairs. She closes door very, very carefully. Frederick takes off or unhooks dress*). Boy, I can't get over it. Me, Martie.

EMMETT. Yeah, you'll get to Hollywood yet.

[*Mrs. Carson hears both of these remarks.*]

FREDERICK (*as door closes, he and Emmett whirl to left and gaze horrified at closed door*). Did you hear anything?

EMMETT. I don't know. It did sound like the door.

Well, anyway it was probably Betsy, if it was anyone.

FREDERICK. Betsy probably forgot to close it tight and came back to fix it. (*He slips off dress and slip, and rolls down trousers.*) Boy, it's sure good to get out of that thing. How girls manage with all those curtains is more than I can see.

[*He gets and puts on shoes, socks, in rocking chair.*]

EMMETT (*carefully folds slip and dress and places them in chest*). Hey, Frederick, could you use a valet or maid, or a manager, or something when you get to Hollywood? I think I'm pretty good as a maid. (*Dramatically on left of table.*) Ma'am, may I cream your face now? And here is your rouge and powder. Madam looks swell today.

[*He stands back to admire Frederick, who is sitting at*

FREDERICK

chair behind table beginning to cream his face to remove rouge.

FREDERICK. I'll take you up on that. Here, Celeste, remove my cream.

[He hands cleansing tissue to Emmett, who takes it and carefully removes makeup. He then gets and hands to Frederick his shirt and sweater. They pack up makeup box and together shut the chest and lock it carefully. The curtains close to indicate the passing of a few days.]

* * * *

Mr. and Mrs. Carson are on stage; Mrs. Carson dusting the center table and Mr. Carson standing below stairs watching her.

MRS. CARSON. But really, John, I can't help but feel this isn't the right way to deal with the situation.

MR. CARSON. Nonsense, do you think I'll have a son of mine thinking he's an actor? What would my friends say? Do you think for one minute I'm going to stand the comments of my friends at the club? Why, they would have the nerve to say, "John, old man, I hear you have a boy who has one of the modern young people's aim, to be an actor. Nothing like actors and poets, old man, to make a father proud of his son. My son is going to be a civil engineer. Too bad yours couldn't go to college and become one too. But then I suppose you'll be glad to know he chose his own vocation." I tell you, Helen, that is more than a man can bear. If the boy was any good, but to have him dawdling his time away mooning over a Hollywood career like a silly girl! If it was Betsy, I'd be mad enough, but my son — it's unthinkable. I won't have it. I'll get him over this silly fancy if it's the last thing I do. Paul will second me in that. He'll tell the boy he can't act, and since Frederick admires him or his reputation so, let's hope that Paul's verdict will be final. I won't have it — I won't have my son be an actor.

FREDERICK

MRS. CARSON. Now, now, John, there is no need of your becoming so excited. Paul will be here in an hour, and I'm as sure as you are that he will set Frederick right. (*Brightly.*) Did you buy him the tool chest today?

MR. CARSON. Yes, and the best one in town. I don't want the boy to think I'm not fond of him. But he can't be an actor.

MRS. CARSON. Of course not. (*Sighing.*) I'm glad his birthday comes tomorrow, then you can give him the chest and he'll have something to replace his dramatics. He'll probably begin building a boat. John, why don't you tell him about the chest tonight and suggest that you two start a boat tomorrow? That will help him to forget his disappointment.

MR. CARSON. Just the thing. I've always wanted to build a boat. I'll run down now and order the lumber. [*He exits to right.*]

MRS. CARSON (*as she dusts other furniture*). I don't know. I somehow hate to see Frederick humiliated before his friends. I wish, somehow, that his father would just overlook what I saw the other day. Perhaps Frederick would outgrow his fancy. (*Dusts.*) And he did make an awfully sweet girl. Martie Reynolds! How he did suffer when his father made him confess how he had fooled me, and how he had wanted to go to Hollywood all these years. (*Dusts settee.*) Well, perhaps Paul will understand and will break the news to Frederick so that the boy won't mind too much.

[*She gives a last housewifely look to the cellar and exits slowly up stairs left. Emmett, followed by Frederick, enters right.*]

FREDERICK. Boy, I can't believe it. Paul Douglas coming here. Everyone knows how he knows talent. If he says I'm good, I AM GOOD.

EMMETT. Yeah, but somehow, I can't quite understand your father. Are you sure he was the one who sug-

FREDERICK

gested you give a performance here tonight so that Mr. Douglas could see how good you are? You know he didn't act as if he thought you were good, when he first heard about your ambitions.

FREDERICK. Sure, it was Dad. He's all right. Naturally, he was upset when he learned I wasn't going into the bank with him, but as soon as he got used to the idea, he couldn't wait to help me get started in the kind of work I wanted.

EMMETT. Hope you're right. Personally though, if I were you, I wouldn't want Sally and Martie to be here tonight. For some reason I feel it should be a family affair.

FREDERICK. You old thunder cloud. Of course, they're going to be here. Dad invited them himself. (*Thoughtfully.*) You know it has rather puzzled me that Mom wasn't so enthusiastic about their coming. She thought like you that it ought to be a family affair.

EMMETT (*hopefully*). Say, if you want to change your mind, I'll run over and tell Sally you aren't feeling well or something and can't give the performance tonight. (*Brightly.*) If you'll lend me a dollar, I'll even take the girls to a movie for you.

FREDERICK. Just let me catch you taking the girls to a movie! And besides, they are as excited about meeting Paul Douglas as Betsy is. Now, go on home, and I'll see you here at seven-thirty.

EMMETT (*going toward door right*). Sure. But remember, if worse comes to worse, you can depend on me.

FREDERICK. Say, thanks, that's mighty fine of you.

EMMETT. S'long.

FREDERICK (*whistles, looks over room, then walking toward stairs*). Hollywood, here I come.

[*Curtain falls to indicate the passing of a few hours.*]

MR. CARSON (*at the top of stairs, left*). Here's the place, Paul.

MR. DOUGLAS. So this is the den of iniquity. (*Follow-*

FREDERICK

ing Mr. Carson down the stairs. He is a middle-aged man, well-dressed and most efficient and business-like in his movements.) I can't say, John, that the boy had much to inspire him here. But I can remember when I was a boy, the name of an actor would get me going. Say, I like the boy's selection of pictures. (*Looking over Frederick's array.*) Nothing theatrical about them.

[He stands left and below table.

MR. CARSON (*below table*). No, that is one thing that gives me hope. Now, you understand what I want you to do. I want you to give Frederick long enough to show what he can do, and then shut down on him. Tell him he's no good, tell him that only effeminate boys and silly girls want to go to Hollywood. Tell him anything so that he will be thoroughly cured. He trusts your judgment, and what you say will be final with him.

MR. DOUGLAS. Just as you say, but I'm inclined to agree with Helen that a private opinion given after the guests had gone would be kinder.

MR. CARSON. No, I want him to be so thoroughly ashamed that he'll never act another line or step or scene, or whatever you call them, as long as he lives. You'll do it my way?

MR. DOUGLAS. Sure. (*Stepping up to him.*) Let's shake on it.

[They shake hands, and start toward stairs.

FREDERICK (*entering right*). Oh, I say. Mr. Douglas, I didn't expect to see you down here for an hour or so. But it's fine you wanted to come.

MR. DOUGLAS (*swinging around*). So it's you, Frederick. I suppose you're all set for tonight.

FREDERICK. Yes, I hope so; at least I'm trying. (*Stepping forward impulsively.*) Say, I wonder if you'll do something for me, promise me something?

MR. DOUGLAS (*surprised*). Of course, what is it?

FREDERICK. Well, you see, it's like this. Probably you've

FREDERICK

never thought of such a thing, but last night I got to thinking that maybe, just maybe, you understand, you might let your friendship for Mom and Dad influence your opinion of my acting. You wouldn't do that, would you? Will you, could you promise me that if I am really rotten, you will tell me? You wouldn't say I was good just because you hated to disappoint the family, would you?

MR. DOUGLAS. No, certainly not. I'll tell you what I'll do. Suppose I give you my word of honor as a gentleman that I'll treat you as a stranger; I'll test your acting by the same standards that we use in Hollywood. I'll tell you straight from the shoulder exactly what you want to know — whether you are good or bad. O.K.?

FREDERICK. Yeah, that's swell. Boy, that's a load off my chest. Thanks a lot. Will you excuse me? I've an awful lot to do before the performance.

[He dashes out right.]

MR. CARSON. That was luck. Now you can calm your conscience and tell him he's no good — he asked for it.

MR. DOUGLAS. Yes, that throws a different light on the whole thing.

[They start to exit left and meet Betsy staggering down the stairs with two chairs.]

BETSY. Hello, I'm helping Frederick.

MR. CARSON. So I see; he's letting you do the easy work as usual.

BETSY. Uh-huh; ain't he swell? *(Drops chairs at foot of stairs and sinks in one. The men exit. She raises one arm suddenly.)* Oh, Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou, Romeo?

[Frederick, followed by Emmett, enters right and stops to gaze in wonderment at Betsy.]

FREDERICK. Huh?

BETSY. Well, I got just as much right to be dramatic as you have, haven't I?

FREDERICK. Oh, sure, but you want to tell us what you're

FREDERICK

trying to do. We might think you were delirious.

EMMETT. Boy, I'm sure glad I don't belong to your family. It's bad enough to be manager for one member without having acting in your blood.

[He sinks down on settee.]

FREDERICK. Here, you two, never mind about that; let's get the furniture arranged. *(He strokes his hair and looks around room.)* I think the best plan is to have the audience sit over there *(Pointing left.)* and have the stage in this corner. *(Points or waves to right upstage.)* Here, Emmett, my man, give me a hand with this table.

[Emmett drags himself out of seat, and the two boys carry table to rear left corner.]

EMMETT. Say, I'm not the heavy mover around here.

FREDERICK. Oh, no? Anyhow, help me with the settee.

And, Betsy, don't sit there looking thrilled; put the chairs in a row facing the corner, or maybe this side. *(Indicates right. Frederick and Emmett drag the settee to the left down corner of stage. Frederick drags rocking chair and places it on a line with settee, but upstage from it. Betsy arranges two chairs she brought from house in a row behind settee and carries one of the chairs beside table and places it downstage in the same row. Emmett carries remaining chair from center stage to right rear corner. The chest is left where it was.)* Now, you people, sit down while I give you final instructions. *(He sinks on chair right rear, Betsy sits in rocking chair and Emmett on settee.)* Betsy!

BETSY. Yes, sir.

FREDERICK. I want you to act as usher and announcer.

Let Mom and Dad sit on the settee and Mr. Douglas in the rocking chair. I want him to be comfortable. And the girls in the second row. You can have the other chair if there is one.

BETSY. I like that!

FREDERICK

FREDERICK. And mind you be dignified! And you, Emmett, are to read the other part of the skit. Mr. Douglas said he only allowed other candidates ten minutes of reading, so I suppose we'll have to cut down on the lines. Boy, how I wish he would let me give some scenes that I know by heart, but he says reading a selection and trying to get in some action as you go along is a better test. You'll act the other part, won't you?

EMMETT. Oh, sure. I'll do anything for the sake of art. What's the name of the guy I'm to be?

FREDERICK. Time will tell. What do you say to going over to your house where it's quiet and going through it a couple of times?

EMMETT. 'S all right with me. Who did you say I was to be?

FREDERICK (*not hearing, or appearing not to hear, Emmett, thoughtfully*). Man, how I wish I could dress the part! But Mr. Carson say it isn't done. Hope the girls won't mind much such a short performance. Anyway, Mom said she'd give us something to eat afterwards and we could dance in the living room. That ought to keep them from being too let down.

EMMETT. Say, Martie said she'd wear her newest gown from Paris. Bet she'll be a knock-out.

FREDERICK. She'll be a knock-out all right. Come on, let's get going. (*Rises.*) Hey, let's take the makeup kit with us and try how we'd look with a little makeup. Maybe Mr. Douglas won't notice it and he will like the reality of our complexions.

EMMETT. Sure. (*Rises.*) But step on it.

[*He starts for door right.*]

FREDERICK (*goes to chest, takes out kit, and exits right*). Just another hour!

BETSY (*still in chair*). Yeah, just another hour before your execution. Guess I'd better pick a lily for the dear boy.

FREDERICK

[She jumps up and exits right. The curtain drops and rises. Betsy, wearing the same dress, is practising ushering. She is in center stage.]

BETSY. Mrs. Carson, I am so glad that you could come. May I show you to a seat? *(She walks over to settee and assists invisible lady to be seated.)* And dear Mr. Carson, I believe we have met before, will you be kind enough to allow me to show you to the best seat in the house? *(She goes to meet him and then ushers him to settee.)* And dear, dear Mr. Douglas, I know I should have taken care of you first, but I had something I felt you should know. You can't think what it could be? My dear Mr. Douglas, I am surprised at you. You can't guess? Then I must tell you. I want to go to Hollywood! You are surprised! But I can act! See. *[She sweeps across stage in imitation of movie actress.]*

As she is rehearsing, Mrs. Carson, followed by Mr. Douglas and Mr. Carson, enter on stairs; they may or may not be in evening clothes. They stand for a moment watching the scene.

MR. CARSON. Betsy, how many times must I tell you not to pose.

BETSY. Y-y-y-yes, sir. *(She sidles to foot of stairs.)*

May — may — may — I show you to seats? Oh, heck, I can't be formal. Mom, you sit here, Pop beside her, and Mr. Douglas, Frederick wanted you to be extra comfortable, so he made me save the rocking chair for you. Hope you like it, but I wouldn't rock in it if I could help it 'cause it squeaks at times.

[She points to each place as they are taken by the three adults. Chattering is heard offstage right. The adults talk to each other.]

MARTIE. Oh, deah, heah we are at lawst. How thrilled I am. Just like Europe.

[She enters followed by Sally. Both of the girls wear long, pretty afternoon or evening dresses.]

FREDERICK

SALLY. Uh-huh, we're here. (*She walks toward Mrs. Carson.*) Good evening, Mrs. Carson.

MRS. CARSON. Good evening, Sally, are you as thrilled as we are?

SALLY. And some!

MRS. CARSON. Sally, this is Mr. Douglas; I suppose Frederick has told you about him.

SALLY. Oh, good evening, Mr. Douglas. I can't tell you how proud I am to meet you.

[*She is sincerely and unaffectedly pleased.*]

MR. DOUGLAS (*rising*). And I am sure I am delighted to meet a good wholesome young lady like you.

[*He bows.*]

MARTIE (*from center stage*). Ah me, how like Paree this is — so Bohemian — so chic — so ahhhhhhhhh — Parisian.

[*She poses.*]

BETSY (*from left front*). What is?

MRS. CARSON. Hush, Betsy. So you find this like Paris, Martie? I'm glad.

MARTIE (*startled at voice*). Ah, dear mother of Frederick. Forgive me; I was dreaming as I often do, dreaming aloud.

[*She glides to Mrs. Carson and curtsies.*]

MRS. CARSON. Martie, this is Mr. Douglas.

MARTIE. Oh, no, not really, not the great Mr. Douglas, the Mr. Douglas of Hollywood. No, this wonderful thing could not have happened to poor, little me.

MR. CARSON (*rising*). It has, and he expects you to forget your Paree in his presence at least. He too has basked in the sunshine of Paree.

MR. DOUGLAS. Good evening, young lady; you flatter me.

[*A bell rings offstage right.*]

BETSY. Hey, that's the signal for quiet. They — the actors are coming. Martie, you sit there, and Sally here; that leaves the end seat for me. (*She points at*

FREDERICK

places. Then she advances to center stage and faces group.) I now have an announcement to make. *(She bows.)* Mr. Frederick Rutledge Carson has written a play, a short play, and from it he has taken the most heart-gripping scene. He plays the part of the villain, and Emmett Masters the part of the injured. I present to you, ladies and gentlemen, "He Who Laughs."

FREDERICK *(offstage right, he utters a blood-curdling laugh)*. Ha-ha-ha-ha —

MARTIE. Oh, dear Mr. Douglas, aren't you thrilled?

FREDERICK. I have you now in my power. You are helpless. *(He enters and, much to the surprise of everyone including Betsy, is wearing a swallow-tail coat, a top hat, spats, gloves and a black, long mustache.)* Ha-ha-ha-ha — You are in my power. *(He holds in his left hand a single sheet containing the script, from which he reads occasionally. But his speeches should be well-spoken and his gestures definite.)* Come, my fair one, I shall not harm you. Come.

[He turns and holds out his hand toward right door.]

EMMETT. Yes, no. Yes, no. *(He is reading laboriously from script held straight before him in his right hand. He is dressed in a woman's dress, but his own shoes, and wears a narrow ribbon around his head and tied in a bow on the top, and has considerable lipstick and rouge carelessly applied. He still wears his glasses. The stage audience has all it can do to keep from bursting out laughing. Mr. Douglas hides his amusement behind handkerchief and a polite cough. Emmett puts left hand in Frederick's outstretched right hand, reads from paper in right.)* Yes, I trust you. I know you mean no harm.

FREDERICK. Of course you trust me. I will do you no harm; have I not saved you from the suffering of leaving your ancestral mansion? Answer me, have I not?

EMMETT. No — I mean, yes.

FREDERICK

FREDERICK (*facing center front and standing between and slightly upstage from Emmett and the group, he begins in a low, moving voice.*) You think of me as a villain. I am dressed as a villain is supposed to be, in spats, a frock coat, a silk hat, and a long mustache. I seem to make your mind do my wishes; I bought the mortgage on your father's home; I asked as a reward that I might have your hand in marriage. I have done all that the traditional villain must do to get the innocent young girl into his clutches. But I am not this man that you think you see before you. I am Howard Richards, who truly has never harmed a living creature. I dress like this when I feel that I can accomplish more good by hiding behind a disguise. The only mortgages I buy are those that unscrupulous grafters are about to foreclose; the only homes I force the occupants to leave are those that are rebuilt at my expense to make more comfortable dwelling places; the only innocent girl I charm is you, the one girl I have always loved. Here is the mortgage bond; give it to your father and tell him he need never repay the money. Here is my heart for you to take if you will — it has never been offered to any girl before. Will you take it, my love?

[*During this speech Mr. Douglas has leaned forward, everyone is absolutely quiet, and lulled by the even full tones of the seriously delivered words.*]

EMMETT. Yes.

FREDERICK (*dropping his pose and turning to Mr. Douglas*). And, sir, your condemnation.

[*There is absolute silence and quiet, while all of them gaze at Frederick in amazement.*]

MR. DOUGLAS (*finally springing to his feet and grabbing Frederick by the hand*). Condemnation? Not mine. That was as fine a bit of acting as I have had the pleasure of seeing in many a day. That was fine.

MR. CARSON (*still seated*). My word, and I thought he

FREDERICK

needed to be cured. (*He puts his hand to his head in a puzzled manner.*) And a tool chest and my boat!

FREDERICK. You mean I'm not hopeless? That some-day I may have a chance in Hollywood?

MR. DOUGLAS. Yes, I believe I know talent when I see it, and with a few more years of school, I know that you'll find your place in the college plays the studios are putting out.

FREDERICK (*crestfallen*). College plays?

MR. DOUGLAS. Yes, college plays, probably as a football player — but don't let that discourage you. Before you know it you'll be middle-aged and playing the dramatic part you've fixed your heart on. You've got the stuff it takes to make good.

FREDERICK. Gosh, thanks.

[*He stands stunned in center stage. The group is now standing and chattering excitedly as they start to move forward to congratulate Frederick.*]

EMMETT (*still seated at right*). Gosh — (*Awed.*) So he was Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.

MARTIE (*dashing forward*). Dear Frederick, I've always known you were just too, too wonderful.

[*She takes and holds his hand as curtain falls.*]

-

THE RING

By

VIRGIL L. BAKER

Copyright, 1940, by Samuel French.

CAST

LUELLA, *who walks in her sleep.*

LON, *her husband.*

YOUNG MAN, *representing what Luella dreams Lon is thinking of her.*

YOUNG WOMAN, *representing Luella's submerged fears and doubts.*

OLD LUELLA, *representing what Luella dreams she will be and what may happen.*

OLD LON, *representing what Luella dreams Lon will be and what he may do in the years to come.*

SETTING. A country cabin.

TIME. The present and the future.

NOTE ON CASTING. Lon and Luella may play also the parts of Old Lon and Old Luella. A double for Luella will be needed during the dream scene if Luella plays also the part of Old Luella. The double comes in during the first blackout and leaves during the blackout after the dream scene. The Young Man and Young Woman are played by actors with similar voices and physiques to Lon and Luella.

THE RING

The setting is an abandoned room of a log cabin now used as a storeroom with an adjacent modern hallway to its right. There is a window and a door in the upper wall and an open fireplace at left. The walls, showing much evidence of dust and cobwebs, are browned with smoke. Snow is banked high outside the window. The time is late at night.

At the rise of the curtain the ends of the log partition and the modern hallway are masked. The wind whistles and snow is driven by the window. A door leading from the hall into the storeroom squeaks on its rusty hinges and Luella Morrison, about thirty, in kimono and slippers with a shawl thrown over her head, enters and walks as if in a trance to the window where she stands for a moment. She raises her head, passes her forearm and hand over her face and sighs deeply. She then crosses to the door and fumbles at a chain which secures it. As the blizzard comes up to a shrill blast, wailing, her moan blends and increases and then dies off with the moan of the wind. She approaches the fireplace. Soon a light appears at the door through which she entered, and Lon, her husband, wrapped in long dark dressing gown and slippers, comes with an oil lamp. He holds the lamp high to peer into the darkness. Luella, not turning, but conscious of the light, moans, shrieks, then composes herself.

LON (*speaking impatiently*). Luella, come to your bed. (*Luella, not heeding, makes waving motions at the floor before her, standing with her back to him.*) Come to your bed. You've got to quit making a fool of yourself like this.

THE RING

LUELLA (*indicates positions on the floor*). It was right here I stood, and Lon . . . he stood there.

LON (*advancing to her*). What's got into you? You've been doing this for weeks. Prowling about in the dead of the night! It's got to stop!

LUELLA (*in a weird, wailing tone*). Ah, yes, he loved me then, Lon did.

LON. Luella! You're talking crazy; this is terrible!

LUELLA (*removes her shawl and makes a bundle of it and places it under her arm.*) And I'll come back to him here, and he will come to me.

LON. It's bitter cold. You'll freeze. What do you mean? I'm here.

[*She does not answer.*]

LUELLA. It was here we were married. Years ago. He'll come back to me.

LON. Why do you keep thinking about that? You're walking in your sleep. Don't you know? Come back to bed.

LUELLA (*beginning to wail again*). I'll die if he don't come back. I wish I could die.

LON (*seizing her arm*). Luella, what's wrong? I don't know what to do to get you to stop this.

LUELLA (*staring*). Oh. Somebody help me! Help me!

LON (*shaking her*). Luella! I'm right here. I'm Lon! You're coming back to bed. You mustn't take on like this.

LUELLA (*speaking as in a trance*). Don't let him hurt me. He always hurts me. Make him go away! Oh, Lon, husband, where are you?

LON. I'm sorry, Luella, I'll try and help. If you're not coming I'll get a blanket and throw over you.

[*He leaves, taking the lamp. Luella, sobbing, extends her hand before her and gropes her way toward an old rocking chair at right center. As she crosses she stands silhouetted against the feeble light from the outside window. The wind outside now comes up to full intensity, then dies*]

THE RING

away in a wail, into which Luella's moan blends and dies away after it. The lights outside the window are dimmed out and she is lost in the darkness.

There is silence for a moment after which the light outside the window comes up, revealing the snowbank and flying snow. The flat which had concealed the hall and front of the log partition has been drawn off right during the black-out. The double for Luella can now be seen, dimly, seated in the old rocking chair, with head partly bowed as if asleep. Soon, Old Luella, bent and heavily wrapped, and with a lantern, crosses to the window outside. The storm comes up again blowing her shawl and her hair. She comes to the window, looks in, holding her lantern up beside her face, trying to spy into the room.

LUELLA (*stirring and moaning*). The same old nightmare again, over and over and over. (Old Luella, after a moment, crosses to the door of the store-room and tries to open it. She shakes the door, causing the chains which secure it to rattle. Luella starts, waves her hand about helplessly and screams in the throaty tone of a nightmare.) Oh — oh — oh . . . Lon, help . . . help! Oh, oo-oh.

[*She relaxes and becomes calm again, breathing heavily. The door is shaken violently again. Presently Old Luella is seen crossing by the window. Then the door into the hallway opens slowly without sound or hands to open it and Old Luella stands motionless on the doorstep. She has a bundle under her arm. A man and a woman, both young, enter the hall as Old Luella stands in the door. The man glides to the storeroom door and stands guarding it. The woman stands aloof. The man, after a moment, raises the beam of his flashlight to Old Luella's face and holds it there.* OLD LUELLA (*putting her hand to her eyes*). You're hurting me.

LUELLA (*moans*). Oh — oh. Lon . . . Lon . . . help!

OLD LUELLA (*stepping forward*). Don't look at me that way. I'm only coming home.

THE RING

MAN (*speaking in a chanting intonation, without looking at either*). It's that old woman.

WOMAN (*speaking in a chanting intonation without looking at anyone*). She's got no business here.

OLD LUELLA (*making for the door into the store-room, she pushes the Man away*). This is my home. Don't anyone try to interfere with me.

MAN. She can't go in there any more.

WOMAN. He doesn't like for her to go in there any more.

OLD LUELLA (*with her hand on the store-room door latch*).

He can't keep me out of my own home; I'll go anyway.

MAN. She's old and stubborn.

WOMAN (*putting her arms about Man*). She's not young any more. Look at her. She's worn out and done for.

OLD LUELLA (*speaking desperately*). I'll never give up 'til I die. (*Throws open the door.*) He can't keep me out of here. See! I opened it!

[*She laughs — a forced hysterical laugh.*]

MAN. Listen to her.

WOMAN. She's forgotten how to laugh. You can't laugh when your heart aches.

MAN. Look at her! She don't know what she's doing!

WOMAN. She's not in her right mind any more.

OLD LUELLA (*moves into the store-room with her lantern and stands about the middle of the room*). People are talking behind my back.

MAN. She's acting crazy.

WOMAN. She's afraid.

MAN. She walks in her sleep and talks crazy.

OLD LUELLA (*facing back toward Man and Woman*). It's because the way Lon treats me that I walk in my sleep. I'm not afraid. I'm not crazy!

[*She sobs.*]

WOMAN. She's afraid she's going crazy.

LUELLA (*twisting and moaning*). Lon, help me. I'm frightened. You're driving me mad. Oh, God.

OLD LUELLA. I've got to do something. I've got to work

THE RING

hard or I'll go crazy. I'll light the fire. (*Man and Woman creep into the room and stand apart. She does not look at them.*) Go away. I don't need anyone. I can do things myself. I don't need any help.

MAN. She's worrying and fretting about nothing. What's a man to do?

OLD LUELLA. I'll show him I can live without him or any man. I'll show him. (*She puts her hand down to the fire and it blazes up full, lighting the room.*) See, I don't need Lon! (*Between her teeth.*) I don't need anyone.

WOMAN. Look at her. She thinks she can do things all alone without any man to help her.

OLD LUELLA (*sobbing again*). I'll show Lon I don't need him any more.

LUELLA (*moaning*). Lon. . . . LON . . . help me.

OLD LUELLA (*stares into the fire for a moment and then begins to look about the room, oblivious of Man and Woman. At first she seems to be confused, but as she finds familiar objects she becomes calm again. She puts down the bundle she carries under her arm, and goes to the side of the fireplace and pulls out a hoe which stands in the corner*). It's Lon's hoe. That's where he always sets it. (*She sets it back and goes to the corner cupboard and takes out a plate. She rubs the dust from it.*) Lon got me these when we were married. (*She puts it back on the shelf.*) Oh, Lon, Lon, how could you ever change as you did? (*She goes toward the fireplace and takes up her bundle again.*) They can't take this from me.

WOMAN. She's suffering.

MAN. I don't know what's got into her lately.

OLD LUELLA. Oh, how my heart aches.

MAN (*leans over and takes a blanket from the floor*). I'll put this around her shoulders. I pity her, but there doesn't seem to be anything I can do about her.

LUELLA (*twisting and moaning*). I'm so — so — cold.

THE RING

OLD LUELLA. That feels good, so good, and so warm.

[*Woman sets a rocking chair before the fire and Old Luella, without looking, sits and stares into the fire. Man takes a stick of firewood from the floor before him and, going to the grate, places it on the fire. They then move up behind her and stand a little to the right and facing front.*]

OLD LUELLA. The fire is beautiful now. How good it is to be home again. He'll be coming soon. (*She places her hands on the bundle she carries and raises it a little.*) I'll be ready for him when he comes.

[*She glances about suspiciously, as if someone might be watching her.*]

WOMAN. Look at that bundle she has.

MAN. Goodness knows what she'll be doing next.

WOMAN. It wasn't any use for her to bring that. He won't pay any attention to that.

OLD LUELLA. Oh, he may laugh at me, but I just had to bring it. It is so beautiful. (*She pauses and looks into the fire.*) I'm so warm. I think I can sleep now. And then I won't dream any more, or walk in my sleep.

MAN. If she'd just sleep and quit prowling around at night. . . .

WOMAN (*speaking straight front*). There's no sleep for one whose heart aches.

OLD LUELLA. Oh, he hurt me. He was cruel.

LUELLA (*moaning — inarticulate*). Oh, oh . . . Lon . . . Lon . . . !

OLD LUELLA. But he didn't mean to. Men are like that; they quit loving you. They don't mean to, but they do.

WOMAN (*as Old Luella looks up hopefully*). But there's some kindness in the breast of all of us.

MAN. He'd help her if he knew how.

OLD LUELLA (*looking absently about*). Lon, you must come to me. I'll teach you to be thoughtful and kind.

MAN (*moving near door right*). He never thinks of her.

THE RING

WOMAN (*moving near Man*). Lon is the same as dead to her since he quit loving her.

OLD LUELLA (*sobbing*). Oh, my heart will break. I'm old and ugly. His love is dead, dead these many years. But I'll love him, forever and forever, and I'll bring him back to me.

MAN. He'll never come back to that old woman.

OLD LUELLA. No! No! I'll never give up. Though he hates me till the day I die, I'll love him. He'll come back to me. (*She sings weirdly.*) "Home, home, home, sweet home" (*The words trail off into breathiness.*) How happy we were here in this beautiful little cabin. It seems ages ago we were married. And how kind he was then. How kind and gentle. Kind, gentle Lon.

MAN AND WOMAN (*in a very low tone echo*). Kind, gentle Lon.

OLD LUELLA (*in happy, contented tones*). He'll come, he'll come.

[*Man and Woman leave so silently and quickly that their going is not noticed. Old Luella, humming snatches of "Home Sweet Home," turns her attention to her bundle. She unwraps it very carefully, takes out her white lace wedding dress with its long sweeping veil and holds them at arm's length before her, admiring them. At length she takes them, first the dress, and then the veil, and hangs them over the tall chair below the fireplace where she can see them distinctly. She arranges them carefully and, stepping back, admires them again. Presently she returns to her chair and sits. As she sits, there is a sudden flash of lightning which glares brilliantly throughout the room. The storm comes up in a weird whistle and dies off again accompanied by a sharp clap of thunder. She sits motionless, but a flicker of a smile passes over her face as it is red-dened by the flame from the fireplace. She rises and places the lantern in the window so that its light may be seen outside, then returns and sits motionless. After a moment*

THE RING

Lon is seen groping through the storm by the window. He pauses briefly outside the window, then proceeds to the door. It opens silently without the aid of human hands and Lon, as an old man, wrapped in a heavy cloak, stands in the doorway. Slowly he steps into the room and the door moves shut as mysteriously as it had opened. He removes his great cloak and is revealed in his wedding clothes. Removing his hat, he hangs it and his cloak beside the cloak of Old Luella. He goes to the fireplace and stands warming himself, with his hands clasped behind him.

OLD LUELLA (*who has not moved nor looked at him until now, speaks*). It is a cold storm, Lon. (*He does not answer, but stands motionless.*) It often thunders and lightnings bad in the late winter blizzards.

OLD LON (*speaking in a low, hollow tone*). Luella.

OLD LUELLA (*stirring herself as if to rise*). I'll lay the supper for you.

OLD LON (*sternly*). No.

OLD LUELLA. Are you cold, Lon?

OLD LON. This kind of blizzard is hard on the stock, the young lambs and the calves.

OLD LUELLA. I've waited all these years for this night, Lon. For you to come to me, as you used to come.

OLD LON. Well, I have come, Luella.

OLD LUELLA. And to hear you speak to me, just once more, as you used to speak to me. . . .

OLD LON. That is one reason why I came, Luella.

OLD LUELLA. It's so good to hear you say my name again, Lon. For you to say, Luella, the way you have said it to me twice now.

OLD LON. I didn't want to come here tonight. I wanted to be let alone, but you disturb me.

OLD LUELLA. It is not I who disturb your peace and quiet, Lon.

OLD LON. I begin to see that. I have not been satisfied with life, either.

OLD LUELLA. I've tried, but I can't forget you. You

THE RING

always come back to my thoughts, awake or asleep in dreams, and I suffer. (*Rising as if to embrace him.*)

Lon, my love.

OLD LON (*impatiently*). Do not touch me.

OLD LUELLA. But you do understand, now. Don't you?

OLD LON (*after a moment*). I'm not sure that I do; everything.

OLD LUELLA. But, Lon, you have come back to me.

OLD LON. Yes.

OLD LUELLA. Why did you . . . come?

OLD LON. I told you I had to.

[*He looks at the wedding gown and veil.*]

OLD LUELLA (*goes to back of chair*). That is not true,

Lon. You did not have to come. You wanted to come.

OLD LON. Yes, I did want to, a little.

OLD LUELLA. I'm sorry if I torment you. But I can't forget you, ever.

OLD LON. I wanted to come, I guess, because I wanted to bring you something.

OLD LUELLA (*hopefully*). Oh, did you? What is it, Lon?

OLD LON (*reaching into an inner pocket in his coat*). It is nothing.

[*He brings out a little black case with a ring in it.*]

OLD LUELLA (*goes to him and takes the case*). A ring.

OLD LON. It isn't much, but I wanted you to have it.

OLD LUELLA. It's beautiful. A golden ring all set with sparkling diamonds.

OLD LON. I never gave you many things like this.

OLD LUELLA. Lon, it is beautiful. Wonderful. I've always wanted your ring. It will be our wedding ring, won't it?

OLD LON. Yes. I'm sorry I never got you one, but . . .

OLD LUELLA (*joyfully*). Now you'll want to put it on my finger, won't you? I'm sure you will.

[*Hands ring to him.*]

OLD LON. Yes. In a little while. (*Then proudly looking at the ring.*) I made it.

THE RING

OLD LUELLA. Did you, Lon?

OLD LON. All myself, I made it . . . out of fine gold and clear white diamonds.

OLD LUELLA (*admiring it*). Lon, the diamonds gleam like stars on a deep June night. You have changed, haven't you? And you have on your wedding clothes. Now we can be happy together, so happy. (*Goes to her dress eagerly.*) Lon?

OLD LON. Yes.

OLD LUELLA. This is our wedding night. See, I brought my wedding gown and veil. Did you remember, too?

OLD LON. Yes, Luella.

OLD LUELLA (*goes back to him*). Let's forget everything, all those years; everything but those happy days when we did mean so much to each other, when we were kind and tender one to the other.

OLD LON. I'd like to be happy with you again, Luella.

OLD LUELLA. Now tell me why you wish to give me the ring, and then put it on my finger, won't you?

OLD LON (*turns the ring over and over in his fingers, puzzled*). Well, I just want to give you something. I don't know why it should be a ring, or just what it should mean. I thought it would look well on your hand and you'd like it. That's why I made it for you, I guess.

OLD LUELLA (*with a puzzled smile*). Is that the only reason, Lon?

OLD LON (*impatiently*). Yes, that is all. What other reason could there be? (*Old Luella turns her face away, disappointed. He sees this and speaks with deep emotion, seizing her arms.*) Well, I'll tell you why. It's just because you are Luella, and you're a woman and you're mine. That's why.

OLD LUELLA (*startled; after a moment steps back from him*). Lon!

OLD LON. Hold out your hand. I'm going to put it on your finger.

OLD LUELLA (*struggling; holds out her hand and then*

THE RING

after a moment, just as he is ready to put it on her finger, pushes his hand away and turns from him). No . . . I can't!

OLD LON (*after a moment*). Aren't you going to take my ring?

OLD LUELLA (*stunned*). No, I cannot take it.

OLD LON (*gruffly*). Why not?

OLD LUELLA (*looking back at him tearfully*). Can you never understand?

OLD LON. You're stubborn. That's why you won't take it.

OLD LUELLA (*kindly*). It's you who are stubborn, Lon.

OLD LON. I've had enough of this. I'll go.

OLD LUELLA (*startled*). No, Lon, don't go!

OLD LON. What's the use? I came here to give you the ring. Now you won't take it.

OLD LUELLA (*kindly*). I can't take it. I would be acting a lie. We've tried that way once, but it won't work.

OLD LON. We've failed then. There's no use to try again. I'll go.

OLD LUELLA (*restraining him*). No, no, don't!

OLD LON. Why should I stay now?

OLD LUELLA. We haven't failed. We have only failed to understand each other. Don't you really know why I won't take your ring?

OLD LON. No, I don't. You have something in your mind, but I can't understand what.

OLD LUELLA. Oh, Lon, dear; can't we humans ever get these things straight?

OLD LON. I've done all I know to do.

OLD LUELLA. Are you sure?

OLD LON. Well, I've come here tonight, but you don't seem to understand my coming.

OLD LUELLA. But I do understand you, Lon, perfectly.

OLD LON. Well, what shall I do? Tell me. What is my mistake?

THE RING

OLD LUELLA. Perhaps a woman understands things like this more than a man does. Lon, do you realize? This is the first time you've ever asked me to express what I feel. And now that you have, well, I'm afraid to speak lest I hurt you.

OLD LON. You can't hurt me more than you have. You wouldn't take my ring.

OLD LUELLA. It seems so strange, me telling you this, my husband. But isn't it this way, Lon? If you give me the ring just because it's me, just because I'm a woman and your wife, that isn't really marriage, is it? Love is more than mere possession, surely.

OLD LON. I see. It's because we are old and can't begin over again.

OLD LUELLA. No, it isn't that.

OLD LON. If we were young again, love would come natural. But when we are old . . .

OLD LUELLA. No, Lon, love can grow warmer and deeper as husband and wife grow older. It isn't age that matters.

OLD LON. Yes, it does. (*Pointing to the fire.*) It's just like that flame. After it burns for a while, gradually it dies away.

OLD LUELLA (*deeply hurt*). Lon, you mustn't say that.

OLD LON. Must we not face the facts?

OLD LUELLA. The fire only dies when one fails to put fuel on it.

OLD LON. Yes, I know that.

OLD LUELLA. Love must be nurtured, just as the fire must be fed.

OLD LON. I know how to keep a fire bright and warm, but love . . .

OLD LUELLA. I'll teach you. I'll help you.

OLD LON (*impatiently*). You can't teach one to love. You can't feed it the way you put wood on a fire. That isn't natural.

OLD LUELLA. It is the most natural thing in the world.

THE RING

(*Going to him as if to embrace him.*) My dear. You're just like the fine helpless boy I married years ago. I love you. I'll help you.

OLD LON (*recoiling*). Don't touch me. I won't have it. You make me feel like a child. You're not my mother, you're my wife. You'll do as I say. You'll not touch me. (*Luella moves away, sobbing.*) Luella, don't you understand? I'm your husband, and you are mine.

OLD LUELLA (*with compassion*). There can never be true marriage like that. . . . I'm not yours, and you're not mine. Husband and wife can't do with each other as they please. Love dies when they do.

OLD LON (*sensing the depth of her feeling*). Luella, you're suffering. I do not want you to suffer.

OLD LUELLA. Can you not clasp my hand and lend me your strength when I so much need help?

OLD LON. Yes, but such things are for lovers, not for strong men.

OLD LUELLA. True lovers are always strong men and women, Lon. Love is not for weaklings.

OLD LON. Well, there are so many things to think about. The farm and the cattle and the crops.

OLD LUELLA. But these things need not keep us from thinking of each other too. . . . Really loving each other makes all these things easy. We cannot take each other's love for granted. We must feed our love.

OLD LON. I have never thought of love that way. Love seemed like such a natural thing, well, it didn't seem to need much thinking about.

OLD LUELLA. I think about it a great deal. I love you so, and I keep thinking how I can do things for you.

OLD LON. It isn't all just spontaneous and natural with you then?

OLD LUELLA. Yes, but it's more than that. I keep thinking of all the things I can do for you, special little things that will make you happier.

OLD LON. Yes, I realize that now.

THE RING

OLD LUELLA. I've been doing that all these years and it's kept my love for you warm, even when you didn't seem to care. Just think. We had to feed the flame of our love, even before we married, by thinking and doing things for each other, didn't we? There's never any difference, young or old.

OLD LON. That way of thinking about love is too planned and unnatural.

OLD LUELLA. What you think about, always, you love; and what you love, you think about, always. Love is a circle of thoughts and deeds.

OLD LON. Even the love of man for woman?

OLD LUELLA. Yes, even the love of man and woman, of husband and wife.

OLD LON (*turning the ring over and over between his fingers*). I see. Love is a ring. I wanted to bring you a ring; I didn't know why, but now I do.

OLD LUELLA. My husband, you do understand.

OLD LON. I shall give you the ring.

OLD LUELLA. Husband, dear, I so need the warmth of your love.

OLD LON (*holding up the ring*). Love is a circle like this ring; a circle of kindly thoughts and gentle deeds.

OLD LUELLA (*holding up her hand*). Put the ring on my finger and we shall be happy always.

OLD LON (*taking her hand*). Luella, what you have said is true in part and what I have said is true in part, but there's a greater truth which both of us feel now.

OLD LUELLA. Yes, Lon?

OLD LON. Just this, Luella. I love you.

[*He puts the ring on her finger, then holds her hand tenderly.*]

OLD LUELLA (*putting her hand on his, and looking up at him*). And I love you.

OLD LON. That is the mystery of mysteries. (*She looks up at him for a moment, then at her ring, and then bows*

THE RING

her head, sobbing lightly.) I wanted to make you happy, not to cause you to suffer. Why do you cry?

OLD LUELLA (*looking up at him*). Oh, my husband, my husband. The sublimity of love . . . the suffering of love.

[*He stands facing her for a moment. Suddenly there is a flash of lightning and a peal of low thunder. He releases her hand. The door opens and Old Lon turns and walks through it and on beyond the window hurriedly. The door swings shut. Old Luella remains fixed for a moment, then turns and walks toward the open door, but it closes just as she reaches it. She turns and walks slowly toward the chair in which Luella sits asleep. The lights begin to dim and by the time she reaches the sleeping Luella, the room is in darkness. The flat has been returned to conceal the hall and end of logs. The whistle of the storm comes up gradually and into it after a moment grows the wail of Luella. Lon comes with the lamp, and has a blanket.*

LON (*now stands over her with his lamp and touches her hand*). I've brought you this blanket, if you won't come back to bed.

LUELLA (*rises slowly and startled, with body tense and rigid in every muscle. She takes his hand in both of hers and stands facing him. She speaks in a tense, hurried whisper*). Oh, Lon, darling. Lon, darling.

LON. Yes. Yes. Come now.

LUELLA. Lon. The thunder and the lightning.

LON. It's only the light of the lamp and the slamming of the door.

LUELLA (*in terrible breathy excitement and internal terror*). Oh, Lon, Lon dear. You've helped me.

LON. Come on now. You've been here as long as I can stand it. I can't sleep with you in here, don't you realize that?

LUELLA (*still tense and terrible*). Oh, Lon, husband.

THE RING

You are good, so good, to come to me again. And darling, to bring me the beautiful, beautiful ring of fine gold with the sparkling diamonds that shine like stars in the June nights.

LON (*himself startled*). Luella. Stop this. Stop it, I say.

LUELLA (*clinging to him with all her strength*). Lon, husband, lover. We won't ever be harsh with each other again, ever, ever, will we? (*He does not answer.*) When I came here there was the dearest young couple here. They had just been married a little time and they were so fresh and young. They loved each other so. I saw it in their eyes. Maybe they were us. (*She laughs grimly.*) Maybe they were us. They were such lovely lovers. I cried and I cried.

LON (*shaking her*). Luella. This is no time to stand here, and talk like this. You'll freeze. Come on to bed.

LUELLA. He built a fire for me. He wouldn't let me freeze. (*She leans forward and stares.*) The lightning flashed and there he stood. In his wedding clothes. He had come back to begin all over again. It was good I came.

LON. Come now, do come. What is that you have under your arm?

LUELLA (*shrinking away from him*). NO! NO! Don't touch that! Not that! I'm keeping that for when I marry him. Our honeymoon again.

LON. Come! I don't want to have to leave you again.

LUELLA. But, darling. Think what is in store for us. The future. Our future. How happy we will be. (*Holds up her hand.*) See, the ring.

LON (*staring at her*). The ring. What ring, Luella?

LUELLA. My darling, your ring; the golden ring and the sparkling diamonds and your soft caresses.

LON (*he puts his arm about her and attempts to awaken her*). Luella, my dear, I'm sorry. You must come. Awaken now.

THE RING

LUELLA (*awakening with a start*). Lon, Lon, what is it? Where am I? (*She looks at him and then about the room startled, then at her hand.*) My ring! The ring you gave me just now. Lon, Lon, it's gone!

LON (*urging her*). Come, come. We can go now.

LUELLA (*she awakens fully and as she does so, she relaxes. She takes the folded shawl from under her arm and looks at it, tosses it to a chair and sighs deeply*).

I'm sorry. Oh, God, why do I have to be like this?

LON (*putting his arm about her tenderly*). It is nothing at all, don't think of it at all. I'm sorry, dear. I've been a stupid fool.

LUELLA. You are so kind and patient with me. You didn't used to be. I appreciate it so. Do forgive me.

LON. I'm sorry I haven't always been thoughtful and kind.

LUELLA. Lon, don't think I am stubborn. I'm weak. I need your help, oh, so much.

LON. Yes, dear. I never realized till now. I'll keep you.

LUELLA. Lon?

LON. What is it, dear?

LUELLA. Don't laugh at me. But honestly I'm afraid. I'm afraid I'm losing my mind.

LON. Now, now, never fear that, Luella. You won't do this again, ever. I'm going to make everything restful and happy for you. You will never need to fear anything again.

LUELLA (*looking at him strangely*). Lon, what has happened? Your voice is so kind; and you're so strong. Oh, I'm tired, Lon, so tired. I want to rest in your strong arms.

LON. I've been thinking what a fool I've been all these years, dear. It's my fault. It's because I've been so busy and left you alone so much, and haven't always been thoughtful. I'm going to change all that. We haven't been away from this place together for years;

THE RING

we're going to take a trip, a long trip together, just you and I; and there'll be new clothes for you and new faces. . . .

LUELLA. But Lon, can we leave the farm; can we afford that?

LON. We're not going to think about this trip that way; we're just going to take it. It'll be like a honeymoon again.

LUELLA. Lon, darling! I dreamed something . . . something like that. (*Then turning to him suddenly.*)

Lon, did I say something in my dream, while I was walking in my sleep? Something I shouldn't?

LON. No, dear, no, no. Not at all. And Luella!

LUELLA. What is it?

LON. I've always wanted to get you a wedding ring, a neat gold ring with diamonds. I'm going to have it made for you special, just the way I want it. And right away.

LUELLA. But you shouldn't think of me; there's the farm and the stock. . . .

LON. Anybody can mind the farm and the stock; only I can take care of you.

LUELLA. You make me so happy. I don't deserve this.

LON. Yes, you do. It's just because you are Luella, and a woman, and you're mine . . . (*Luella looks at him quickly.*) No, it's because you're not mine and I'm afraid I'll lose you.

LUELLA. Lon, dear, what ails you? You haven't talked like this for ages.

LON. It's because I love you.

LUELLA. It's precious to hear you say that to me again.

LON. Come now. Don't stand there mooning in the cold.

LUELLA. I don't feel a bit tired now.

LON. Don't worry. We're not going to waste time by sleeping now. We're going to talk. Come and sit

THE RING

with me at the fireside. There are plans to make.

(*He goes for the lamp.*) I'll get the lamp.

LUELLA. I'll come.

LON (*as they go out together*). Yes, Luella, there are plans to make before we sleep. Yes, sir, plans to make and deeds to do, before we sleep.

Curtain

MARY FINDS A MOTHER

By

PHOEBE HOFFMAN

Copyright, 1940, by Samuel French.

CAST

PRISSY ATWATER, *the secretary, twenty-five. Wears a smart summer dress, suitable to business.*

MARY, *an attractive, vital youngster of sixteen. Wears slacks in first part of play and a goodlooking afternoon dress for her final entrance.*

TOM MARTIN, *an engaging young man of twenty-six. He wears a goodlooking colored shirt and trousers of a business suit.*

MRS. BRANT, *a charming woman in her late thirties. She is an actress who has lost her memory. Stylish street dress.*

JOHN MCALISTER, *a conventional young man, about twenty-six, a statistician. He wears a business suit.*

MAESTRO, *a crazy, jealous magician. He wears a large black hat, and a black cape if obtainable, if not black hat and a shabby business suit. He carries a gun.*

MARY FINDS A MOTHER

The office of the Entertainment Supply Company, which is in the living-room of the bachelor apartment of Tom Martin and John McAlister.

The lefthand side of the room, the office, is neat and businesslike. The other half is a typical bachelor's den. Most articles are on floor within easy reach. A butterfly net, homemade, with a broomstick handle, is on arm-chair. Pile of magazines on floor near couch, where reader can pick them up and toss them conveniently over his shoulder onto table back of couch, where they are piled with photographs of freaks, artists, and wild animals.

Prissy's desk is down left. Housephone and outside phone are on her desk. Filing cabinet back left. Door left opens into hall which leads back through apartment. Door back center opens into dining-room; latter is used as a waiting-room. Door right leads into bedroom. The atmosphere is happy-go-lucky, novel, and extremely pleasant. A small world of its own, the sort into which we would all like to escape.

As the curtain rises Prissy is seated at her desk. It is eleven o'clock on a hot Saturday before Labor Day.

Prissy is a pretty, rather serious girl but with an unsuspected sense of humor.

Mary lies on couch reading magazine. She tosses it onto table, picks another off pile. Takes a cracker out of box, and eats it.

Phone rings.

PRISSY (*answering*). Entertainment Supply Company. Yes — speaking. Good morning, Mr. Benson. Rockefeller's just the frog you want. Jump over anything.

MARY FINDS A MOTHER

We named him after Radio City. Yes, I'll send him to you right away. Goodbye. (*Hangs up. To Mary.*) Will you do me a favor?

MARY (*cautious*). What is it?

PRISSY. Take Rockefeller up to Mr. Benson in the Chrysler Building?

MARY (*coaxing*). Prissy — it's not good for me to go out in this heat. Mrs. Brant says so.

PRISSY. Like fun. Do you good to go out and get some exercise, you just lie there and eat crackers. You'll be fat as a pig.

MARY (*protesting*). Prissy — every hour I get up and do interpretive dancing for five minutes. Watch me. (*Rises, picks up butterfly net, dances round as if chasing butterflies, puts down net on table, crosses to Prissy, putting her arm around her shoulder, serious.*) Besides, I have a special reason for wanting to be here this morning.

PRISSY (*playfully*). I don't doubt you have some wonderful reason all ready. Turn on the tap and out comes the reason.

MARY. No, Prissy. Honest Injun, I'm serious.

PRISSY. I believe you. Now let me get Western Union. [*Mary wanders back to couch. Prissy dials.*]

PRISSY (*into phone*). Western Union. Send a special messenger to 435 East 34th Street. Apartment 10 J. Thanks. (*As she hangs up, phone rings.*) Entertainment Supply Company. Oh, yes, Mr. Van Zorn.

[*Tom Martin, an engaging young man, about twenty-six, rushes in from bedroom. He is in his shirtsleeves, and looks very upset.*]

TOM (*excited*). Where's Tamerlane?

PRISSY. Oh, Tom, Mr. Van Zorn's on the phone.

TOM. I can't speak to him now. Don't you see the state I'm in? Tamerlane's missing.

[*Starts to search.*]

PRISSY (*into phone*). Yes, Mr. Van Zorn. Can I take

MARY FINDS A MOTHER

the message? (*Interested.*) Miss Prim. That's exciting news. You must all be so thrilled. I'll tell him. Thank you. (*Hangs up. To Tom.*) Miss Prim's expecting.

TOM (*absorbed*). Expecting — what?

PRISSY. Her first litter of cubs.

MARY. Who's Miss Prim?

PRISSY. The leopardess we sold the St. Louis Zoo last spring. I forgot. Mary, you were probably off with your mother number one at the time.

MARY (*lifting a cushion, pausing*). Prissy, if you don't stop calling those women my mother, I'll fire this thing at you.

PRISSY. You've had so many mothers I can't keep track of them all.

MARY (*lowering cushion, slowly*). I haven't decided on any mother — yet.

TOM (*who has been searching everywhere*). Girls, stop quarreling. For goodness' sake! Can't you ever stop thinking about anything but your own precious concerns? Tamerlane's lost. Do you hear? Lost! Lost!

PRISSY. Yes, Tom. Did you look in the bathtub?

TOM. Yes, and in the kitchen sink too. (*To Mary.*) Get off that sofa.

MARY (*rising*). That comes from calling him after a conqueror, the cruelest man in history. He built castles out of human skulls. . . .

TOM (*wild*). Oh, hush up.

MARY. But Tom, you're always complaining I'm a little ignoramus, and don't know anything, and now when I show off my learning . . .

TOM. Stop, for pity's sake. I'll never complain again. Where's Mrs. Brant?

MARY (*very innocent*). Down in her room — resting.

TOM. Well, I wish you'd go down and rest too. Take a good long rest.

MARY (*solemnly*). Thomas Martin, you're sore at me,

MARY FINDS A MOTHER

and your nerves are all on edge because you're afraid I won't find a mother. And if I don't find a mother, or a mother find me, you'll lose your bet with my co-guardian, John. . . .

TOM. Dry up.

[*Housephone rings. Prissy answers. Tom goes out into dining-room, still looking.*]

PRISSY (*into phone*). Send her up. Well, put a chair in the elevator. She can get in all right if she sits down. And, oh, Pat, if a strange-looking man wearing a large black hat and cloak, and calling himself "The Maestro," comes round, don't let him up on any account. (*Hangs up. To Mary.*) Don't you let him in here if he should get by Pat. He's a magician and a hypnotist and he's married to Miss Bijornson, the Giantess. They're separated and he's trying to get her to come back to him. He's following her around and making a general nuisance of himself. She's on her way up here now, and he may come up after her.

[*Tom returns from dining-room.*]

TOM. Prissy, will you get off that chair and look for Tammy?

[*Doorbell rings.*]

PRISSY (*patiently*). In just a minute, Tom. That's Miss Bijornson.

[*She goes out into hall.*]

MARY. I don't see why you're worried about poor little Tammy. He's just a great big kitten. He won't do any harm.

TOM (*deadly*). Oh, no. He's just beginning to get fierce. That's why I sold him to the zoo. I promised delivery this afternoon. And how are the other tenants going to feel when they see a young panther cub frisking down the hall?

MARY. Tammy's so cute. The way he looks at you and waves his tail.

TOM. Yes, and he may get playful and spring at some-

MARY FINDS A MOTHER

body. Then where would I be? The house detective would shoot him on sight.

MARY (*alarmed, going to desk, picking up housephone*). That would be awful, Tom. Shall I warn the house detective?

TOM (*thoroughly upset*). Leave that thing alone. I don't want my lease broken. And be landed out in the street with a couple of crates full of wild beasts. I've got to find that panther before anything happens.

MARY. But Tom, what could happen to Tammy?

TOM. How do I know? Any one of a hundred things. None of the animals have ever been loose before.

MARY. No, except Bozo, the baby gorilla, that time he went upstairs to the cocktail party.

TOM. They thought he was part of the entertainment. (*To Prissy, who returns.*) You take the backstairs. I'll go along the halls.

PRISSY (*calm, professional*). Tom, you better speak to Miss Bijornson. She's very upset. She refuses to go to the Burpee Milk picnic on Labor Day.

TOM (*on edge*). Good heavens! Why?

PRISSY. It's the Maestro. They've been quarreling again. You know how temperamental she is.

TOM (*disgusted*). All she has to do is walk round the picnic grounds and let them see she's nine feet high. [*Mary sits on sofa.*]

PRISSY. They asked her to open a baseball game. She took it as an insult to her prestige as the World's First Lady Giantess. I tried to show her it was a compliment. But she's sulking because she wants to tell you her troubles, Tom. She has a tender spot for you.

MISS BIJORNSEN (*without, in dining-room*). Oh, Miss Atwater, Miss Atwater. I'm not accustomed to being kept waiting.

PRISSY (*soothing*). Yes, Miss Bijornson. He's coming right away.

TOM. Get rid of her, Prissy. I must find Tammy.

MARY FINDS A MOTHER

PRISSY. I'll attend to Tammy. I think I know where he is. Go talk to her.

TOM. Oh, all right. But drop everything for Tammy.

PRISSY. I will. (*He goes into dining-room. Standing above Mary.*) Sit up.

MARY. Why?

PRISSY. Because I want to ask you a question. What have you done with Tamerlane?

MARY (*sitting up, innocent*). I know nothing about him, absolutely. Cross my fingers.

PRISSY (*unconvinced*). I suspect that you do.

MARY. Why pick on me because Dad was a wild animal tamer? I'm off wild animals for life. I used to have to come out and sit in the cage as part of the act. I did it a couple of times a day as a kid, but gee—I never got over being scared.

PRISSY (*sitting on arm of couch, chummy*). Poor kid! What a life! And then to have a pair of crazy loons like Tom and John for your legal guardians. Why did your dad ever pick them?

MARY. Oh, Dad knew I liked the boys and he trusted them. And poor, sentimental old darling—he thought I'd grow up and marry one of them. (*Gaily.*) But, Prissy, you've spoiled my chance with John by getting engaged to him.

PRISSY (*thoughtful*). You wouldn't be happy with John.

MARY (*jumping up, embracing Prissy*). Idiot, of course not. Or with Tom either.

PRISSY. I think you're very wise trying to find a mother.

MARY. I want a home, Prissy. Tom's married to his pets. It's a crazy life here and I adore it, but there isn't enough for me to do. I can't live alone with Tom. And I'm sick and tired of boarding schools.

PRISSY. I don't blame you.

MARY. I'll tell you a secret, Prissy. I'm almost sure I'll choose Mrs. Brant. I'm putting her to a final test today.

MARY FINDS A MOTHER

PRISSY. I thought you were up to something — extra special. (*Phone rings; she answers.*) Entertainment Supply Company. He's busy right now. Miss Atwater speaking. I can take the order. A thousand butterflies. By October first. Don't worry. They'll be at your school in Los Angeles in time. We've never fallen down on an order yet.

[*John McAlister enters left. He is well dressed. He and Tom have roomed together ever since college. For, like Prissy, he enjoys the absurdities and excitements of the Entertainment Supply Company, and finds it a great relief after a hard day on Wall Street.*]

MARY. Good morning, John.

JOHN. Hello, Mary, are you up already? (*Goes over to Prissy, kisses her.*) Good morning, dear. (*To Mary.*) Where's Mrs. Brant?

MARY. Downstairs. In our apartment.

JOHN. Then run along down to her, kid. I want to talk to Prissy.

MARY. I prefer Ethelrinda. She's lots more exciting.

[*She slips into dining-room.*]

JOHN (*kissing Prissy again*). Darling.

[*He sits on edge of desk, puts his arm around her.*]

PRISSY. John, you're a Wall Street magnate, but I work for an animal entrepreneur. And this is our busiest time of year, just before Labor Day.

JOHN. Well, you can take time off for a kiss, and talk just a few minutes.

PRISSY (*kissing him lightly*). There's the kiss. But I haven't time to talk now. So run along like a good boy.

JOHN (*annoyed*). I'm not going to be dismissed like a school kid.

PRISSY. I'm sorry, dear, but I'm frightfully busy. We just received an order for a thousand butterflies, to be delivered by the first of next month.

JOHN. Oh, hang the butterflies.

MARY FINDS A MOTHER

PRISSY (*shocked*). John!

JOHN. Oh, I know I won the hobby prize at college. Tom had the room so full of snakes and snake-fanciers I took to butterflies in despair. They don't take up much space. (*As Prissy starts to rise.*) Dear, I want to talk to you about getting married.

PRISSY. But, John, we can talk about getting married any time. If you wish to be really helpful you'll go over into Jersey and catch me lots and lots of butterflies. There's the net on the table.

JOHN. I'm not going over to Jersey to catch butterflies on a hot afternoon.

PRISSY. I'll spend the rest of the day phoning all the butterfly collectors on our list.

JOHN. Jimminy crickets, Prissy! You have butterflies on the brain. It's certainly time you got married and quit your job.

PRISSY (*annoyed, at filing cabinet*). You say that because I'm working for Tom.

JOHN. When we're married we'll move out of here.

PRISSY. Naturally. (*Picking up phone.*) Long distance, please. Twenty, Edgewater, New Jersey. Oh, Mr. Dance, this is Priscilla Atwater of the Entertainment Supply Company. Will your club help us out, Mr. Dance? We need a thousand butterflies. Anything but moths and yellow millers. The sooner the better. Thank you. (*Hangs up, sweetly, to John.*) Now, dear, what were you saying about my job?

JOHN. I said you'd have to give it up.

PRISSY. Impossible. John, you love this lunatic existence as much as I do.

JOHN (*yawning*). Lunatic's right. I want a wife and a home where I can get some sleep, and no night-prowling animals about. (*Yawning again.*) I woke up last night with young Tamerlane purring on my chest. Not another wink did I get.

MARY FINDS A MOTHER

PRISSY. Did you take him out of his cage this morning?

JOHN (*snorting*). I did not. Now sit down. I want to talk to you about Mary.

PRISSY (*resignedly, sits*). Very well.

JOHN. The idea of her adopting a mother was all right a year ago. This madhouse is no place for a peppy young girl. But when we're married everything will be different. We'll have a nice, quiet home of our own. And she can spend her holidays with us.

PRISSY. Yes, John. (*Checking on her fingers.*) Then Mary must have taken Tamerlane to frighten Mrs. Brant.

JOHN. Prissy, for heaven's sake. Try and concentrate on us.

PRISSY. I am, John.

JOHN (*cross*). No, you're not. You're wool gathering all over the place.

PRISSY. You *will* discuss our private affairs in business hours. John, I have to locate Tammy.

JOHN (*peevd*). Heck and blazes. I hope he scares the woman, scares her pink.

PRISSY. No, Tammy won't do that. He's a very quiet little cat.

JOHN (*ruffled*). You take it all very calmly.

PRISSY (*sweetly*). Someone has to be calm round here.

JOHN. Prissy, you discovered Mrs. Brant. What do you really know about her? Anything?

PRISSY. She came to us highly recommended.

JOHN. Yes, I know, as an actress. She may be all right on the stage. But as a prospective mother it's different. Why, she's lost her memory and doesn't even know her real name.

PRISSY. Mary's mother was an actress, wasn't she?

JOHN (*grunting, unwillingly*). Hum, hum.

PRISSY. Very well — and so far Mrs. Brant is the one person who really seems to understand Mary and care

MARY FINDS A MOTHER

for her. And I think interest and affection in a mother are more important than anything else.

[*The phone rings, then the doorbell. And a parrot offstage in bedroom begins calling.*]

PARROT. Hurray for Woodrow Wilson. Hurray for the League of Nations.

JOHN (*irritated*). Some day I'll ring that busted parrot's neck.

PRISSY (*as she answers phone*). John, will you go to the door, please? (*Into phone.*) Entertainment Supply Company. Can I take a message? Just a minute. I'll call him. (*She goes to dining-room door.*) Oh, Mr. Martin. Phone.

[*John goes into hall.*]

TOM (*entering*). Prissy, have you found Tammy?

PRISSY. I'll get him back all right, Tom. Don't worry.

[*John comes back.*]

TOM (*taking up phone*). Yes, George. The Maestro's crazy. Sorry I had to take him off the program, but I don't trust him. What—a seal? What do you want with a seal?

JOHN (*to Prissy*). A special messenger.

PARROT (*without*). Polly wants a cracker. Hurray for Woodrow Wilson.

TOM (*frantic*). Will someone shut that parrot up? (*Into phone.*) Sorry, George, I wasn't speaking to you. (*Mary, curious, enters from dining-room. As Prissy starts to go.*) For Pete's sake, stay here.

PRISSY (*to Mary*). Feed Polly, please. And put Rockefeller in a box and bring him in to me.

POLLY. Hurray for Woodrow Wilson.

[*Mary saunters off into bedroom.*]

TOM (*into phone*). Excuse me, George, but it's noisy round here. All right, old fellow. We'll do the best we can. (*Hangs up, to Prissy.*) George wants a performing seal for Monday night to take to the Maestro's place.

MARY FINDS A MOTHER

PRISSY. I think Marty's at liberty. His seal might do.

TOM. It's to perform on a terrace by a swimming pool.

But it mustn't go in.

GIANTESS (*without*). Mr. Martin. Mr. Martin.

POLLY (*without, at same time*). Polly wants a cracker.

[*Mary appears at bedroom door, has pasteboard box in her hand.*]

MARY. Here's Rockefeller, but I can't find Polly's crackers.

PRISSY (*comes to couch, picks up cracker-box, hands it to Mary*). You were eating them yourself. (*Takes other box from Mary.*) Now feed the poor bird.

Hurry up.

[*Mary goes back into bedroom. Prissy goes out into hall, returns in a moment, goes to filing cabinet.*]

JOHN (*exasperated*). Prissy, come here.

PRISSY (*deep in file*). I'm sorry, John. Go on talking,

I'll listen while I'm locating Marty.

JOHN (*jealous*). Prissy, do you love me?

PRISSY (*astonished*). Of course.

JOHN. Then pay some attention to me.

PRISSY. I am, John, but the Goliath Country Club's one of our best customers. We had a bangup program planned for their big dinner dance on Monday night. But we had to take off the Maestro. He's been hypnotizing the women in the audience right over the foot-lights.

JOHN. Prissy, do you realize I have to put out two thousand dollars in cash if Mary adopts a mother?

PRISSY (*patiently*). Yes, John, I've heard you say so often enough. But you made the bet yourself.

JOHN. I didn't expect to get married then.

PRISSY. What difference does it make?

JOHN. Difference? It makes all the difference in the world. Mary doesn't need a mother now.

PRISSY (*coming down to desk, with feeling*). Mary's mother was lost in a hurricane when the poor child was

MARY FINDS A MOTHER

three. From then on, it's been one hotel and boarding school after another. She needs a mother and I'm going to see that she gets one.

JOHN. Doesn't two thousand dollars mean anything to you?

PRISSY (*emphatic*). No — no. (*Dials a number.*) Is Marty there? Ask him to call PL-4-5555, as soon as he comes in. (*She hangs up, crosses to John.*) I'm ashamed of both you boys, especially you, John. Mary's father left her to you as a sacred trust, and you gamble on her.

JOHN (*uneasy*). Gee, Prissy, you've got me all wrong. I'm not going back on Mary. Two years and she'll be in college. She won't need a mother in college. Besides, Mrs. Brant may get her memory back and find out she has a large family of her own somewhere.

PRISSY. So much the better for Mary. She'll have lots of company. (*Phone rings. Doorbell rings.*) That's probably Mrs. Brant. Let her in, John. (*Answering phone.*) Yes, Marty. Fine, thanks. Could you do a show Monday night? Goliath Country Club. Eight o'clock dinner dance. Great. I'll call you again Monday.

[*John goes into hall and returns with Mrs. Brant, a sweet, attractive woman in her middle thirties. She has charm and character.*]

MRS. BRANT. Good morning, Miss Atwater.

PRISSY (*hanging up*). Good morning, Mrs. Brant. I hope you had a good rest.

MRS. BRANT. Splendid, thanks. I slept right through till the operator called me. Is Mary here?

PRISSY. Yes, she's feeding Polly. (*Goes to bedroom door.*) Oh, Mary, Mrs. Brant's looking for you.

[*Mary enters, still munching a cracker, stops when she sees Mrs. Brant, studies her.*]

MARY. Good morning, Mrs. Brant.

MARY FINDS A MOTHER

MRS. BRANT. Good morning, dear. Eating again.
You'll spoil your appetite for lunch.

MARY. Oh, I just had a bite with Polly. (*Eagerly.*)
Did you rest well, Mrs. Brant?

MRS. BRANT (*astonished*). Yes, of course.

MARY. Nothing frighten you?

MRS. BRANT (*suspicious*). Frighten me? What should frighten me?

MARY (*very casually*). Oh, I was afraid you might have had a nightmare or something.

MRS. BRANT (*not deceived*). Mary, if you're trying to play a trick on me you haven't succeeded. I like to be thoroughly frightened. I always hope it may bring my memory back.

POLLY. Polly's hungry. Polly wants a cracker.

[*Prissy goes to Mary, looks into cracker box which is empty.*]

PRISSY. Pig. No wonder she's still calling for a cracker.
(*As she goes into bedroom.*) I'll get you a cracker, Polly.

MRS. BRANT. Mary, if you'll come downstairs now, I'll do your hair that new style before you go out to lunch.

TOM (*without, in hall*). They meant to honor you, Miss Bijornson. You'll go? That's a good girl. Black magic? Nonsense. There's no such thing. He's only trying to scare you. Don't worry. Goodbye. (*He enters left, mopping his brow and sinks into a chair.*)
Heavens! I'd rather deal with a whole troupe of performing monkeys. Where's Prissy?

MRS. BRANT. Come, Mary. I don't want to be late.

MARY (*solemnly*). Just a minute, Mrs. Brant. I have a very important announcement to make to you and the boys. (*Taking center of floor, as they look at her expectantly.*) Guardians — I'm not good at a speech . . . (*Very embarrassed.*) I want Mrs. Brant for my mother — That's all — I guess.

MARY FINDS A MOTHER

MRS. BRANT (*overcome*). Mary, darling, are you sure?

MARY (*going to her, embracing her*). Yes, Mother, darling. Just as sure as that I'm going to heaven when I die.

MRS. BRANT (*smiling*). Then, dear child, certainly you better take more time.

MARY. No.

JOHN (*going over to Mrs. Brant*). You're Mary's ideal of a mother. But are you sure she's an ideal daughter?

TOM. John will go any lengths to pull a smart wisecrack. Don't listen to him.

MRS. BRANT (*bewildered*). Mary dear, I think you had better wait a little longer.

MARY. Bosh, Mother. I know my own mind.

[*Prissy returns.*]

PRISSY. Hello, what's going on?

MARY. Oh, I've just told the boys that I've decided on Mrs. Brant for my mother.

PRISSY (*going over, holding out her hands*). Mrs. Brant, I'm delighted to hear it. I've felt all along that you were the right person for Mary. I know you'll both be very, very happy.

MRS. BRANT (*grateful*). Thank you, Miss Atwater. I'm sure we will be. But it's sweet of you to say so.

JOHN. Mrs. Brant, you're much too good-natured. Take plenty of time.

[*Prissy silences him with a look.*]

PRISSY. Tamerlane's back in his cage.

MARY. Oh . . .

[*She stifles it quickly.*]

TOM (*exploding*). Why didn't you say so at once?

[*He dashes into bedroom.*]

MARY (*uneasy, pushing Mrs. Brant towards door*). Mother, will you do my hair now?

MRS. BRANT (*happily*). It will be the first real motherly thing I've done for my little girl.

MARY FINDS A MOTHER

MARY (*as they go out arm in arm*). And we'll come back and show Prissy how smart I look.

PRISSY (*calling after them*). Don't forget. (*Turning, giving John a dirty look.*) Hypocrite.

JOHN (*paying no attention*). Was Tamerlane really in Mrs. Brant's closet?

PRISSY. Yes, she brought him up the backstairs, and in through the kitchen. I always leave the back door open for Mary to come in.

JOHN. But why did she ring the bell?

PRISSY. She came round the front way to impress Mary. Not to let her think she'd notice anything unusual.

TOM (*entering from bedroom, gleeful*). Well, Tammy's O.K. You'd never know he'd been out. I'm going to take him over to the zoo now. Before he gets loose again. (*Turning to John.*) I've won the bet.

JOHN. No, you haven't. Not by a long shot. Time isn't up till October first.

TOM. Hold on a minute. You bet the Entertainment Supply Company couldn't provide Mary with a mother. And by heck, we've done it!

JOHN. I'm not satisfied.

TOM. To the tune of two thousand bucks. You'll have to come through whether you like it or not.

PRISSY. I'm disgusted with you boys. You're not fit to be Mary's guardians.

TOM. Prissy, honey. I nearly drowned in Ethelrinda's tears. Give me time to dry off. By the way, I made light of the Maestro to her. But he's very revengeful. Look out he doesn't get in here.

JOHN. Don't tell me you believe in his black magic, Tom?

TOM (*doubtfully*). No. . . .

PRISSY. He won't put me in any trance.

TOM. Well, take care of yourself. (*He goes out right.*)

I bet Mrs. Brant never saw Tamerlane.

PRISSY (*demurely*). No, she didn't. He was in her bed-

MARY FINDS A MOTHER

room closet fast asleep, curled up on an old pair of felt slippers. Just as I knew he would be.

JOHN. And you brought him up the backstairs and put him back in his cage. (*Triumphant.*) Then Mary has accepted Mrs. Brant under false pretenses.

PRISSY. Mary and Mrs. Brant were made for each other.

JOHN (*angry*). Rot! This is a swindle. I won't pay that bet.

PRISSY (*slyly*). You won't have to.

JOHN (*hopeful*). Then you will help me get rid of that woman? (*As she picks up phone.*) For Pete's sake.

PRISSY. Long distance. Fairfield 2080. I want to speak to Mr. Howard. (*While she is waiting.*) John, no monkey tricks on Mrs. Brant—I warn you. (*Into phone.*) Oh, have him call Miss Atwater, PL-4-5555, as soon as he comes in. Thank you.

[*Hangs up.*]

JOHN. I'll certainly tell Mary how you deceived her.

PRISSY. It won't make any difference now.

[*Starts for hall.*]

JOHN. Where are you going?

PRISSY. Out to lunch—in the drugstore. (*As he starts to follow her.*) Please stay and answer the phone. I won't be long.

JOHN. You needn't be sore at me, Prissy.

PRISSY. I'm not sore.

[*She goes out into hall and shuts door after her. John turns back, annoyed, drops down on couch and takes a magazine from pile, tosses it aside. Tries another, tosses that aside too. Yawns a couple of times, stretches himself, yawns again, settles comfortably for a nap. A fly lights on his nose; he brushes it away. Puts an open magazine on his face. Telephone rings.*]

JOHN (*half wakes up, looking around, bored*). Oh, shut up, you butterfly fiend!

[*Phone keeps on ringing. The housephone begins ringing. He gets up, exasperated, takes both receivers off*]

MARY FINDS A MOTHER

hooks and settles down peacefully to his nap. Snores.

Lights should be dimmed a moment to show that John is dreaming. The Maestro enters from bedroom, very sinister. As this is a dream his movements can be exaggerated. He speaks in a deep, hollow voice. He has a gun in his hand. He tiptoes over to sofa, stands covering John with his pistol.

MAESTRO (*solemnly*). Wake up!

[*John opens his eyes, sits up with a start.*

JOHN (*dazed, rubbing his eyes*). Hello, Maestro — what are you doing here?

MAESTRO. I want to talk to you.

JOHN. You look like the devil himself in that hat. I wish you'd take it off. (*Motioning to a chair.*) Sit down.

And we could talk a lot better if you'd put up that gun.

MAESTRO (*ominous*). No, Mr. McAlister. You're a stronger man physically than I am.

JOHN (*lightly*). Don't tell me you put your faith in firearms, Maestro. A master of the occult sciences like you.

MAESTRO. I have very little time and I'm going to force you to do yourself a good turn.

JOHN. You're talking riddles.

MAESTRO. You want to save that two thousand dollars.

JOHN (*excited*). S-u-r-e, sure thing.

MAESTRO. Tom Martin's alienated my wife's affections. Until six weeks ago we were a happy couple. She was gentle, affectionate, thought of no other man. Now she has eyes for no one but Martin. She won't even see me or speak to me.

JOHN. Poor old Tom! Don't blame him, Maestro. Just because Ethelrinda . . .

MAESTRO. Stop! Not a word against my wife. (*Grinding his teeth.*) I'll ruin him as he ruined me. Little by little.

JOHN (*pleasantly*). Won't that take quite a long time?

MAESTRO. That's my business. My wife isn't enough.

MARY FINDS A MOTHER

He substitutes a *seal* for me, the greatest magician of all time. He'll pay for it. I'll make him suffer. Call Mrs. Brant on the housephone.

JOHN (*astonished*). Mrs. Brant?

MAESTRO. Yes. She was my helper when I toured in vaudeville. Then I could put her into a trance for a short time only. Now I have discovered a hidden power that will let me project sleep for an indefinite period of time.

JOHN (*holding out his hand*). Maestro, you're my friend for life. I can't afford to lose that two thousand bucks right now. And since we're pals suppose you put up that gun.

MAESTRO (*shaking his head*). No. I don't trust you entirely — yet. (*Still covering John.*) Go on. Call her.

JOHN. She might think it odd, my asking her to come up here. We don't want her to catch on.

MAESTRO (*putting gun closer to John*). No danger. No one knows how I come or go. That's my mystery. The gun I stole, and I took the precaution of wearing gloves in case of an accident. Too bad if you should blow your brains out. No one would suspect me of anything so obvious as a gun.

JOHN (*getting up*). All right, Maestro — anything to oblige a pleasant, cheery chap like you. (*He crosses to housephone. Speaking into housephone.*) Give me 10A, please. Oh, Mrs. Brant, this is John McAlister. Are you busy? There are a few things I'd like to talk over with you. How about right now? I have to stay here and answer the phone. Tom and Prissy are out. If you don't mind. Thanks. (*Hangs up, to Maestro.*) She'll be right up.

MAESTRO (*covering John*). Now disconnect the phone. (*As John starts to protest.*) I can't risk any interruption. (*Covers John while he pulls out wires.*) Now the housephone. (*John does the same to housephone.*)

MARY FINDS A MOTHER

Now lock the door into the dining-room. (*As John does it.*) Now the bedroom door. (*John does so. Door-bell rings.*) Open the door, Mr. McAlister, and don't let her suspect anything.

JOHN (*offended*). Sorry I can't convince you I'm on the level. I . . .

MAESTRO. Let her in.

[*He keeps John covered while he admits Mrs. Brant. As she enters he stands back of John so that for a moment she does not see him.*]

MRS. BRANT (*entering, gushing*). Mr. McAlister, my heart's so full, I'm so happy I can hardly speak.

JOHN. I'm awfully glad, Mrs. Brant. But come in. I think you know the Maestro. He said he was an old friend of yours.

MRS. BRANT (*startled, upset*). Yes, of course, of course. (*Controlling herself.*) How do you do, Maestro?

[*She holds out her hand.*]

MAESTRO (*bowing*). You look lovelier than ever, Eleanora.

MRS. BRANT (*smiling to John*). He's gallant as ever.

But, Maestro, won't you shake hands?

MAESTRO. You know I consider it a barbarous custom, Eleanora.

MRS. BRANT (*lightly, but looking hard at John*). In a moment he'll bring a lollypop out of his coat collar.

JOHN (*chatty*). The Maestro and I were yarning away, and somehow it came out you used to be his helper in his vaudeville days.

MRS. BRANT. Yes, that's a long time ago.

JOHN (*speaking with double meaning*). We were discussing hypnotism. And we got into quite an argument. He claims he can put you out by looking you in the eye. And I told him he was *plain crazy*. That it couldn't be done, and he said if he had a subject he'd show me. Maybe you wouldn't mind letting him try. (*Glancing at Maestro.*) All in the spirit of fun, of course.

MARY FINDS A MOTHER

MRS. BRANT (*giving John a comprehending look*). Yes, certainly. But it's such a long time. I don't know if I'll be able to go off as easily as I used to.

MAESTRO. Leave that to me, Eleanora. Sit on that couch. (*Watches her as she sits.*) Now, Mr. McAlister, will you lock the door into the hall, please? (*John does so.*) Now, Eleanora, will you tie Mr. McAlister's hands behind his back?

[*Pulls cord out of his pocket.*]

JOHN. Look here, Maestro — is that necessary?

MAESTRO (*sinister*). Any movement disturbs me. And I don't want to run any risk of an accident.

JOHN. All right, Maestro. You're the boss.

[*Lets Mrs. Brant tie his hands. Maestro tests cords, is satisfied. John saunters around back of table.*]

MAESTRO. Ready, Eleanora?

MRS. BRANT. Yes.

[*Maestro stands in front of her, dominates her with his eyes. Slowly she relaxes and sinks back into a trance. This should take a little time.*]

JOHN. You'll have to convince me she's really in a trance, Maestro.

MAESTRO (*excited*). Be quiet.

[*He bends over Mrs. Brant. John has been waiting for this opportunity. He snatches up butterfly net from table and hits Maestro over head with handle. Stuns him for a moment. John comes around end of couch and knocks him out. Maestro drops to floor, senseless. His hat comes off.*]

MRS. BRANT (*sitting up, relieved*). Oh, I was so frightened. I was afraid he'd do something dreadful to us. And I feigned a trance to give you time before he really put me out.

JOHN (*kneeling down*). I know a few sleight of hand tricks myself — fortunately. (*He looks at Maestro. Takes gun.*) Well, he ought to be harmless for a little while now.

MARY FINDS A MOTHER

MRS. BRANT (*shuddering*). You can't be sure. He's diabolically clever. I worked with him for three years.

JOHN. I'll fix him. I'll use a stunt we did at college when we kidnapped the president of the sophomore class. We strapped him to a table with a couple of luggage straps. (*Looking.*) We have some here — somewhere.

[*Finally locates straps under a chair.*]

MRS. BRANT (*eagerly*). Let me help you.

JOHN. Thanks. You take his feet. I'll take the head. (*They carry Maestro round back of table. John secures him to table out of sight of audience. Busy behind table.*) La-la, Maestro! You'll stay put for a while now.

MRS. BRANT (*watching*). Pull them tighter.

JOHN (*getting up*). That'll hold him. (*Comes around and gets Maestro's hat, puts it on him.*) He'll have a hard time taking off his hat now.

MRS. BRANT. If he regained consciousness he'd be free in a second. That's one of his best tricks. We must watch him every minute.

JOHN. You better go for the police. He made me disconnect both phones.

MRS. BRANT. No, you go, Mr. McAlister. I know him better than you do.

JOHN. Then take his gun.

MRS. BRANT (*taking it*). Thank you. I know how to use it. (*Sits on sofa, puzzled.*) The shock's set my brain working. If I could only get some clue to myself my memory would come back. I feel that in the past I had something to do with wild animals and magicians. But I don't know what it is.

JOHN. Maybe if you keep on thinking you can remember.

MRS. BRANT. I'll try. But call the police. Please.

[*John goes to hall door, unlocks it.*]

JOHN (*pausing at door*). I hate to leave you alone with him.

MRS. BRANT. Go, please. We haven't a minute.

MARY FINDS A MOTHER

JOHN (*hesitating*). I still wish you'd let me stay.
(*Maestro's sinister hat is seen rising back of sofa. John sees him.*) Mrs. Brant — look out.

[*She turns just in time to cover Maestro with gun.*]

MAESTRO. I can fake as well as you, Eleanora.

MRS. BRANT. Your faking days are over. You'll stay there till the police come for you.

MAESTRO (*persuasive*). Eleanora, if I tell you who you really are, will you let me go?

MRS. BRANT (*startled*). You know who I really am? But how could you?

MAESTRO. Very simple, my dear. You look just like your father the great Tamboni. And you married Stephen Brown, the wild animal tamer.

[*Mrs. Brant faints, falls on couch, drops gun. Maestro seizes gun, and dashes into hall. John runs after him. Blackout. When the lights go on again, John is on sofa sound asleep. He wakes up with a start as Prissy and Tom enter, followed by Mary and Mrs. Brant.*]

TOM. Hey, lazybones. I rang and rang this place but nobody answered.

JOHN (*dazed*). I guess I went to sleep. I dreamt the Maestro was here and threatened me with a gun.

PRISSY (*going to desk*). Did you take the receivers off both phones?

JOHN (*still groggy*). Did I? I don't remember. But I dreamt that he said that Mrs. Brant was really Mary's mother.

PRISSY. So your old subconscious is beginning to work at last.

JOHN. You mean she really is Mary's mother?

PRISSY. Yes, of course.

TOM. Why didn't you tell us?

PRISSY. Because it was so obvious I thought you'd catch on. Mrs. Brant is an actress, and so was Mary's mother. She was missing after a hurricane, and Mrs. Brant lost her memory in one. (*Indicating Mrs. Brant*

MARY FINDS A MOTHER

and Mary, who are clinging to each other happily, too overwhelmed to speak.) They're like as peas in a pod.

TOM. You lose the bet, John.

PRISSY. No, sir. There isn't any bet because the Entertainment Supply Company couldn't find her a mother when she had a real one already.

Curtain

-

LACQUER AND JADE

By
FRANCES L. FOX

Copyright, 1940, by Samuel French.

CAST

ISAAC EVENING.

JOHN HOLDEN.

BEN AMES.

FOUR CHINESE PRIESTS.

ORRIN.

DAVID.

The scene is the large room of a merchant ship, of the mid-nineteenth century. The ship is one of the great sailing vessels that were the pride of New England at the height of her period of China Trade.

The room serves the purpose of dining room and parlor. A door, back, left, and another forward in the right wall. A large long table, with straight chairs, in the center of the room. A porthole window in the back wall, right. Right forward, a low lacquer chest, upon which is a fairly large jade Buddha.

LACQUER AND JADE

Isaac Evening, *a young man of about twenty-two, stands looking out of the porthole, his one hand up, drumming impatiently upon its rim. He is straight and strongly borne, with a quick sensitiveness of attitudes, now enhanced by his nervousness.*

John Holden, *an active-looking young man of Isaac's same age and kind, sits at the end of the table, right, his elbows on the table and his head on his fists. He is dressed, like Isaac, in the duck trousers and trim dark coat of the time, that denote superiority of command on a vessel not over-much concerned with such formality.*

Ben Ames, *a weathered, wise-looking man in his late fifties, sits forward, left, at the table, working on a half barrel with a knife, with slow deliberate motion.*

ISAAC (*turning sharply from window. Rapping it out*).

How long? (*Ben goes on working. John starts in surprise, looks up at Isaac blankly.*) Storm take ye, are you all gone deaf? How long?

JOHN (*bitterly*). If we knew, we'd be God Almighty, Isaac Evening.

BEN. There's no one can say a woman's time. Not when it's her first one.

ISAAC (*impatiently*). That's all you've said since it began with her, this forenoon. Can't . . .

BEN. Don't ask so often if you'd not hear, for it's all a body can say.

JOHN. And it's hard enough as it is, Lord knows, with out you takin' on so with your questions. You're like . . .

ISAAC. Never mind what I'm like — you're not much better! Jumpy as a hen, and no more words than that idol.

LACQUER AND JADE

JOHN. I've more sense than to ask what there's never been answer to.

ISAAC (*childishly*). But she's my sister!

BEN. There's been other men's sisters had young ones before tonight.

ISAAC. Not on the China Seas they haven't.

[*A sharp silence.*]

BEN (*tentatively*). That's so.

ISAAC. Not on a sailin' ship this small, they haven't, that's days out from land and no wind to bring it nigher. Not when there's no woman about to fend for her, and no one but her husband to do what no man's fit for. Not — O God!

[*He flings himself away from the window, sinks into a chair at the table and buries his head in his hands.*]

BEN (*after a pause, aggressively*). There's none better than Captain David to launch the child. (*Silence.*) And a fine Maine seaman he'll be, with his ship under him from the first minute.

JOHN (*as if he had not heard*). What's he want to do it all alone for? It doesn't make right sense. Why doesn't he let us . . .

BEN. The captain takes the wheel in high seas. It's the same thing, likely.

JOHN. Time was when a mate was aboard to help out.

ISAAC. 'Twould be something to do! (*He jumps up, strides over to the door, right. Stands there, his arm out, his hands toward the knob. From within a woman screams sharply. Isaac recoils as if from lightning.*) In God's name, is there *nothing* we can do? (*He strides back, bumping into the chest. The idol slides, and he reaches out to right it, just in time.*) God rot the slippery idol! Sits there grinning, like the sun in the doldrums.

[*The scream sounds again.*]

JOHN (*pushing back his chair*). I wish to heav'n 'twould

LACQUER AND JADE

come my watch, so I could be out of this! What's the time?

BEN. All the two of ye think of is the time — the time! I can tell ye, there's no time on the sea. It blows over with the winds.

[John stands at the door, left.]

ISAAC. The two of you talk as if 'twere on another ship you'd just hailed and past! No time on the sea, is there? Wish you were out of it, do you?

BEN. There's enough of your squalling . . .

ISAAC. It's all fair wind for you, likely. She's no kin of yours, and you've no cause . . .

BEN. She's the captain's own wife for all that, Isaac.

ISAAC (*deflated*). Aye.

JOHN. Just because we don't tread up and down as if we were plowing land doesn't mean we don't take a thing to heart.

BEN. A birth aboard ship's a thing to set stock by, first as last. A fine hearty boy'll bring luck till the end, but a death . . .

ISAAC (*aghast*). A death!

BEN (*mildly surprised*). Aye, a death. Ye knew. Sometimes it ends that way.

ISAAC. You hear of other women, but not her — not Ruth.

JOHN (*coming to Isaac*). It's a word goes against a body, I know. We'd hold with those Chinese, Isaac, who're mortal afraid of death, and clean themselves when they come near it.

BEN. How'd you come to know that, John?

JOHN. Oh, just ashore.

BEN. It's heathen foolishness. Death's a fact.

ISAAC. But not Ruth! She'll not die of this!

[The four Chinese priests enter silently and slowly from the left. They are robed in heavy hemp-colored garments, and carry large wooden rosaries of strangely shaped beads, that they are telling as they walk with ritualistic delibera-

LACQUER AND JADE

tion to the altar. The leader wears his rosary over his arm, and carries a small pair of cymbals, which he softly sounds together as they stand with heads bowed low before the Buddha, murmuring almost inaudible prayer. The men, drawn together at their entrance, stand thus, in uneasy silence, until the priests turn and go out as silently as they came. Ben and John stir in relief; Isaac jerks from his chair, strides to the porthole, and pushes it full open.

ISAAC. They're enough to stifle a man with their stillness.

JOHN. It's enough to give anybody the creeps, for fair.

Those yellow priests, or whatever they call themselves, stalking in and out all day, without a by-your-leave . . .

ISAAC (*suddenly*). Like the shadow of Maine pines, they are.

JOHN. Bowing to that ugly god, and never saying a word a body can understand.

BEN. That's the worst of it. What's not to be known, won't be known. But something that has meaning, and you can't get to know it . . .

JOHN. You never know what outlandish thing they're praying for.

ISAAC. Or what strange kind of god's going to bring it to them — right in this cabin, perhaps.

BEN. Ye're seeing too much in the mist, you two. Swing 'round, I would.

ISAAC. Swing 'round! Don't you feel them, Ben Ames?

BEN. I do. I feel them like I do a dead calm, where you're always waiting for something to blow up. (*A pause.*) It's a bad, uneasy feeling.

JOHN (*vehemently*). They don't belong on an honest Maine ship, and there's an end to it.

BEN. No foreign woman belongs in Canton either, and there's the difference.

JOHN. The captain's a free American, and he can take his wife where he sees fit.

BEN. If Canton has a law against women in the foreign

LACQUER AND JADE

quarter, the Chinese have a right to send one packin' if they find her!

JOHN. They've no right to raise such a fuss over one woman and she as pretty as . . .

ISAAC. They've no right to wish a parcel of heathen priests on us, either, to be carried clear up the coast. You can't put two-fisted men in the wrong that way — makin' them do chores to prove they're sorry.

BEN. We *were* wrong. We were going against their law.

ISAAC. They could've set aside their law when they saw how it was with her.

BEN. That's so. It's no godly kind of a ruling that sends a woman out on the high seas to have her first.

ISAAC. Wicked as the world it is, and fit for damnation!

(The scream sounds again from within. Isaac involuntarily starts toward the door, stops in front of it, turns.)

It's their fault if anything — if she goes . . .

BEN. Likely they were doing what was right with their gods. There's a reason to most . . .

ISAAC. It's the fault of their gods then, that makes men cruel to women, and sons to be — and all for a cold jade idol! *(He turns to the altar in fury.)* I hate the damn' thing — I hate it — that's bringing the calm and the pain and the waiting! *(He grasps it.)* For a bushel of beans, I'd . . .

ORRIN *(from the door, left)*. For God's sake, don't! That's worth money!

[He comes over and holds down Isaac's hands; a broad young man, whose face always wears the beginning of a sneer. He is not quite clean, not quite erect. His motions are loose rather than easy.]

ISAAC *(pulling away)*. Take your pawin' hands off! I know that as well as you do!

JOHN *(with distaste)*. Can't ye leave off thinking of money even now?

ORRIN *(holding the idol)*. What different is this time

LACQUER AND JADE

from any other? (*The three look at him in hostile silence.*) Oh. And when a cow calves in your blessed Maine barn, does it make the day any different for you? ISAAC (*outraged*). Can't you show decent respect even for the . . .

[*He stops short. They all involuntarily look toward the door, and in the shocked silence, avoid each others' eyes. Ben rises to go, putting down the barrel.*]

BEN. My watch. (*Goes to door, left.*) Sing out, will you, if she — if . . .

[*He goes.*]

JOHN (*to Orrin*). Put down that infernal thing or the priests 'll come and find you rubbing your hands over it. And you can't talk them over like you try to with us, I'll be bound. (*Orrin sets it down, but continues to look at it gloatingly.*) You look at it like a man does when he's hankering after a woman.

ORRIN. If I had the money 'twould bring for sale at home, I could have the woman I'm hankering after. It's jade.

JOHN. Jade it may be, or gold, or all the money a Maine ship 'll hold; it will do us no good. Our hands are tied.

ORRIN. Mine wouldn't be, I can tell you. Don't I wish I had it!

JOHN. Well, you don't have it, for it's theirs and it's here, and I wish to hell it wasn't!

ORRIN. 'Twill do no more harm than a jade ring or a pendant, and 'twill bring more. I thank my stars, when I see you two, that I've no squeamish feelin's about gods.

ISAAC (*turning sharply*). How long? (*Orrin laughs loudly in the silence.*) Stop your laughing — it's dirty!

JOHN. It's no matter for laughing. He should 've been out for a spell before this, to say one word or another.

ISAAC (*eagerly*). I thought the same. . . .

ORRIN (*sneering*). What do you two know of such matters? Why, I . . .

JOHN. I know enough to know I don't like the wind of things.

LACQUER AND JADE

ISAAC. If there was only something we could do!

ORRIN. All the work there is to be done, she's doin', I'll be bound.

ISAAC. Ye may save such talk till we're safe ashore, Orrin Lash.

JOHN. It's the wife of your own captain that's taken — and it's different when you've got it in your own dish.

ORRIN. Yes, a lucky birth on board. Well, I wish the ship I'm on no ill luck. (*Sees barrel on table.*) What's that?

[*Isaac lifts his head sharply, drops it again when he sees only Orrin's pointing finger.*]

ISAAC (*flatly*). A cradle.

ORRIN. Not much for show, is it?

[*Goes over to it.*]

JOHN. We didn't figure on needing it. Ben's rigging it up from a barrel.

ORRIN. It's strange lines when a captain's child sleeps in a molasses barrel, and there's a jade figure in the same room, setting on a lacquered altar.

ISAAC. Lacquer! Is that what it is?

ORRIN. That's lacquer, with a fine port price to its name. But what . . .

ISAAC. She always talked of it, Ruth did, when we were young — younger. She would always say, I shall marry a man who moves under full masts and sails to far ports, and he will bring me shawls of silk, and pieces of lacquer and jade. And now she has it this way!

ORRIN (*bitterly*). She doesn't have it. It's theirs.

ISAAC. She always said she'd have her children on land. In the shadow of the Meetin' House, she'd say . . .

JOHN. In the shadow of the Meetin' House! I wish I could see it now — with its white spire. . . .

ORRIN. A sight of good it would do you, here in the middle of an ocean. The worst trouble with folks not on the sea is, they get fair bound to their Meetin's. I'm my own man, and I know it. I'm a freer man than the

LACQUER AND JADE

two of you. If you've nothing but your own good on your mind, ye sail light and ye've less worry.

[Neither seem to have noticed his speech.]

ISAAC. John! Do you think we should pray?

JOHN. Pray? Aye. Pray. I suppose we'd ought.

ISAAC. It would be something to do for her. *(A pause.)*

The women would be praying for her, home. . . .

ORRIN. Well, I never. For all I say . . .

JOHN. You're right. We should have had it in mind sooner. What shall we pray?

ISAAC *(hesitantly)*. We could sing the Old Hundred.

JOHN. It's not enough canvas for this wind.

ISAAC. We always used to say Our Father.

JOHN. But that's not headed for her either.

ISAAC. It says, Deliver us from evil.

JOHN. That's so. That'll do.

[An awkward silence. They look at each other helplessly.]

ISAAC *(bows his head)*. Let us pray.

BOTH. Our Father — who art . . .

ORRIN. So ye'll *pray* the young sannup into the world!

Lord Almighty, have ye never heard . . .

JOHN *(thundering)*. Be still!

BOTH *(slowly)*. Our Father — who art in heaven . . .

Orrin walks slowly to the idol.) Hallowed be thy name — *(Isaac looks up at the sound of moving. Orrin has picked up the idol and is weighing it in his hands, speculatively. Isaac stares at him; his lips move mechanically.)* Thy kingdom come — *(Isaac stops. John goes on alone.)* Thy will be done —

[John looks up, questioning the sound of his voice alone. His eyes follow Isaac's.]

ISAAC *(flatly)*. It's no good. *(Flaring.)* It's that damned idol! It stops me, as if 'twere real.

JOHN. Real!

[He draws back.]

ISAAC. It's a real god there, not just dirty jade. It's

LACQUER AND JADE

like alive, I tell you! It goes against anybody's praying!

JOHN. It was put there for bad. I said it from the first. It's a heathen trick.

ISAAC. It's a foreign god — a strong one — that sets between me and the God I know.

JOHN. A wicked blood takin' god.

ISAAC. Aye, wicked when it makes your words stick in your throat, and keeps an honest man from being heard. I wish to God those priests were overboard — the whole yellow parcel of them! I wish . . .

ORRIN (*with emphasis*). If you took and hove the idol out instead, there'd be an end to it.

[*Isaac and John are caught short in surprise.*]

JOHN (*hopefully*). Heave out the idol!

ISAAC. We can't do it!

ORRIN. Why couldn't you? If it's breaking the luck, and stopping your righteous tongue, like you say.

ISAAC. It's a god, first as last. (*Orrin snorts in derision.*) But the priests!

ORRIN. What of the priests?

ISAAC. They set the world by it. They'd . . .

ORRIN. They've got lots more gods. Their chests are full of such figures. Gold and ivory, and jade — damn them! They could put twenty others in the place of that one — that one god that keeps you from prayin' for your sister.

JOHN. Is that a sure thing?

ORRIN. Yes, I've seen them piled up in the hold there. I've looked at them and counted them out, aye, and planned what I could do with them if they were mine. If I were captain of this ship, I tell you, I wouldn't stand for them on here.

JOHN (*anxiously*). Why not? Do you think they can do real hurt?

ORRIN. They've got enough wealth down there — jade and jewels and the like — to keep a whole village alive.

LACQUER AND JADE

There's enough to keep a man for the rest of his life, with a woman and good drink and no one to answer to — *all* the time, not just times ashore. They've got all that, and what's being done with it? It's made into more gods than they can kneel to at once, and things to set them in, and bells for them — gods that are dead and can't want for anything. And we're here hankering all our lives and never getting enough. What man that's fair 'd stand for it? It goes against the grain . . .

JOHN. Why, you're right. 'T isn't fair — I never saw it that way. You should have told us before. (*Sharply.*) You've been down through their things.

ORRIN. Well, why not? We've a right to know what's on board, even if we've got no other rights. Gods by the dozens! I'd like . . .

JOHN. I never saw it that way. And one god as bad as the other, I'll be bound.

ORRIN. Aye, and each worth more than the next.

JOHN. It's a different feeling, though, to think of them stowed down there in the hold, than to have them up here being prayed to so you don't understand. . . .

ORRIN. Yes, but a man with an eye to justice could do something. If folks who can use 'em sensible can't have them, the bottom of the China Sea's the best place for them.

JOHN. If it's a true thing they're so rich . . .

ORRIN (*eagerly*). They've got nothing but precious cargoes, I tell you, the lot of them — and nothing but temples to do with it.

JOHN. If it's true what he says, Isaac, one idol wouldn't matter, good or ill. And we'd breathe a lot heartier if we were rid of it. (*Isaac says nothing.*) We'd be free of it.

ISAAC. They'd kill us.

ORRIN. A soft steppin' priest kill!

[*He draws back from the altar in terror.*]

LACQUER AND JADE

JOHN. No, they'd not kill. They don't hold with takin' life, and so we're safe.

ORRIN (*suspiciously*). Who told ye that?

JOHN (*mocking*). You mean there's something you don't know? There was a merchant came aboard . . . (*Turning on Orrin.*) You're awful white livered about it, for all it's your idea!

ORRIN. If you were dead you'd get no good out of having it gone, that's all. (*Insinuatingly.*) I'm no more afraid than you are.

ISAAC. But you can't think of doing it!

ORRIN. John and I can think of it. Anyone with mind enough to look out for his own good in danger would see . . .

JOHN. We'll all see different, once it's out from us. We'll feel as if we had our own ship under us again.

ISAAC. Do you forget we took them on board to keep us out of trouble in Canton?

JOHN. They'd no right. We're free men. We've no need to answer to foreigners.

ISAAC. And a fine ship-shape thing 'twould be to make off with their god on such a journey.

ORRIN. They stowed 'em on here without a by-your-leave, or a cent of money for passage, and whatever happens on the way is their own lookout. We've got to stick up for ourselves.

JOHN. 'Twould serve them even, wouldn't it, Orrin, to have trouble in their own dish for what they've done to us?

ISAAC. No matter what they've done to us, you can't tamper with a god.

JOHN. You can when it's one no decent body would hold with.

ISAAC. You can't tamper with any god. It's not natural. No good will come of it.

JOHN. There'll be no good come if it stays in this cabin.

LACQUER AND JADE

You said with your own mouth it worked against your prayers.

ISAAC. It has power, or they wouldn't pray to it.

JOHN. Aye, but not for us. We can't understand it.

Do you think luck will come to the child if you abide with a god that isn't a god?

ISAAC (*helplessly*). I don't know.

ORRIN. Pray, why don't ye, and see what good it does ye — with that thing by the door of your own sister's room!

(*Isaac stares at it fearfully.*) Go on, pray! Pray!

ISAAC (*dazedly*). Our Father — our Father — who art . . .

[*He turns away from the idol with a shudder and covers his face with his hands.*]

ORRIN. You see, you can't! Of course you can't! Don't you think I knew from the first? That god's a devil!

JOHN. Don't you see we're right? Don't you see it's got evil on us? And all we need do . . .

ISAAC (*raising his head, looks fixedly at John*). Would you lay hands on it?

JOHN. Yes!

[*Strides to the idol and puts out his hands. They pause, arrested in mid air, on either side of it. He says again uncertainly, "Yes," but his hands do not move. He turns and looks in frightened waking at Isaac. His arms drop helplessly to his sides.*]

ISAAC (*as if pursued*). I don't know — I don't know.

ORRIN (*sharply*). How long?

JOHN. What?

ORRIN (*hastily*). How long since the captain went into that room? How long since ye've heard a sound out of there? It's past a long time since the child should've been . . .

ISAAC (*with passion*). Take it then, and throw it into the sea, and stop talking of it forever! (*Orrin clamps both hands down upon the idol.*) Stop talking of life and

LACQUER AND JADE

death same's you were taking bearings of the weather!
Stop and do it — do it. Do something for her!

ORRIN. I knew ye were sensible, Isaac! I knew ye
wouldn't let a parcel of priests rule ye! (*To John.*)
We'll get it out quick, while he's set our way.

*[He has crossed to the table and is putting the idol into
the barrel cradle.]*

JOHN. What are you doing?

ORRIN. If they should come trailin' in before 'twas done
I could make off with it in this without them seeing I
had it.

JOHN. You don't need that. Just be quick and hoist it
out!

ISAAC. Hurry — hurry!

ORRIN (*with a shrewd look at Isaac*). Blows hard, doesn't
he, once he's around Hatt'ras? (*Moves back toward
the window with the cradle.*) You two stand watch for
those priests. (*Isaac stands at the table, his eyes fol-
lowing Orrin's every move. John goes back to Orrin.*)
Go back, I tell ye! (*Opening window.*) Stay near the
table there — you want to keep them from sighting me
if they come. Don't let them see you looking this way.

JOHN. They're not here yet. Stop givin' orders, and
hurry!

ORRIN. Happen they come, you sit right down there and
look at the charts. Don't look up or let on you've heard
them. (*He lifts the barrel level with the window.*)
Will ye say goodbye to your idol, Isaac? (*Isaac looks
at him in dazed distrust.*) Hst! I hear them! (*Isaac
and John drop into chairs, like fallen blocks.*) Keep
looking down. (*He does not move the barrel.*) It's
out. I'll try to keep them away from here for a spell
longer.

*[He goes out, left, the barrel on his arm, one hand pass-
ing appraisingly over the idol. He turns at the door and
laughs silently back at them. The two sit in tense si-*

LACQUER AND JADE

lence, motionless, heads bowed. Finally John raises his head slightly, looks around timidly.

JOHN (*in a whisper*). It's gone.

ISAAC. Does jade float?

JOHN (*amazed*). Are you daft?

ISAAC. I was wondering whether 'twould sink. I can see it running along in our wake, trying to catch us . . .

JOHN. You're no man for the sea, Isaac Evening. Such foolishness is for land with solid Maine rock under you, not here — where anything can . . .

ISAAC. What we did was foolishness. We did a wrong thing, John.

JOHN. We did it for the best.

ISAAC. I can't say why it's wrong, but I know from the feel of it . . .

JOHN (*defensively*). We did it for her.

ISAAC. She'll not gain by it.

JOHN. Do you feel that too?

ISAAC. Aye. I know. You can't drown a god and gain.

JOHN. It isn't good for a man to be feeling things. (*A pause.*) Those priests haven't come in yet.

ISAAC. No.

JOHN. What will they do when they . . .

ISAAC. I don't know.

JOHN. I heard of a priest once who *did* kill someone.

ISAAC. Yes.

JOHN. But they *are* afraid of death — I swear they are — I've heard they go through flames to get pure of it.

ISAAC. Yes.

JOHN. I've heard they pretend it isn't death so it won't be true.

ISAAC (*in agony*). Ruth!

JOHN. Good God, man, do you want to bring them in before it's time? Where's Orrin?

ISAAC. What's the odds where he is? The thing's done — and I wish he'd gone over with it! We'd no business listening to him!

LACQUER AND JADE

JOHN. We came around too quickly, maybe, to his thinkin'.

ISAAC. He can talk the wrong so it sounds better than what's right.

JOHN. We did it for good.

ISAAC. No. Something has happened. There should be some tiding. (*The door opens. They jump up, but slump down again, as Orrin enters.*) Oh. It's you.

Well, you've even managed a god.

JOHN. Where've you been?

ORRIN. No word yet?

JOHN. Not a sound. Where've you been?

ORRIN (*loudly*). You'd think they were all dead in there!

[*Isaac starts up, strides to the altar, stands with both palms heavily down upon it, and head bent. John takes a hesitant step toward him, looks at him with pity, turns toward Orrin.*]

JOHN (*indignantly*). You'd think it — but you wouldn't shout it over the China Seas.

[*The door opens and the priests enter slowly. Isaac quickly withdraws from the altar and stands behind it. John draws nearer Orrin, who has risen hastily and now stands shuffling together the papers on the table. The priests walk with bowed heads, intent on their rosaries, till they come to the altar. Then the leader slightly raises the cymbal in his right hand, slightly raising his head at the same time, so that his eyes are level with the altar. He stiffens erect in sharp surprise, staring as if transfixed at the empty altar. Isaac, on the other side of the altar, stands in the same tenseness. The other three priests one by one raise their heads slowly, their still horror becoming a part of their leader's. He stands motionless, except for his right hand holding the cymbal, which, as if without his knowing it, raises slowly, until his arm is extended straight above his head and slightly forward, toward Isaac, as if in a threatening gesture. While he remains in this position, there is a breathless waiting. Orrin, his head half bowed, looks up sideways, stealthily. Isaac, across the altar from*]

LACQUER AND JADE

the priests, fixes his eyes steadfastly upon the face of the leader, in pleading. The moment holds its breath. Then the raised hand falls, suddenly and swiftly. The cymbals clash together in a loud full sound. Isaac's hands clench together tightly; he throws his head back tensely, as if accepting pain. Orrin's low startled oath is quickly muffled by John, who clasps a hand, fumbling in haste, over Orrin's mouth. Orrin angrily, but with eyes still on the priests, tries to struggle free. The metallic sound of the cymbals dies away. Silence.

A low murmur sweeps through the group of priests. They move forward together, surging rather than actually stepping. They pause, and draw back silently. They bow their heads before the empty altar, and begin slowly, with occasional audible murmur, to tell their rosaries. After a moment, Orrin stirs impatiently, scraping his chair, upon which he has been leaning, ahead of him. John looks up at him apprehensively, then at the priests, who go on without seeming to have heard. His tense hold on his chair relaxes, he draws himself more erect, and looks at Isaac.

ISAAC (*in an agonized whisper*). I'd sooner they killed us right out, and made an end to it!

JOHN (*in surprise*). Why, they're praying just as natural — like they always —

ORRIN (*in relief*). Why do you take on so? They go right on without it. What did I tell you?

ISAAC. Don't you know how angry they are? Can't you feel . . .

JOHN (*nervously*). Don't go feeling — again.

ISAAC. Can't you feel their anger? It's tight, like a full sail — swelling and straining. It's strong . . .

ORRIN (*flatly*). You're crazy.

ISAAC. They hate us. They hate us so hard it's a hurt to them. We drowned what they loved as a god, but it isn't taken away from them.

ORRIN. They've no way to know we did it.

LACQUER AND JADE

JOHN. Are you sure it's that way with them, Isaac?

ISAAC. Can't you see — can't you feel it in them? It's fire — it's burning their hearts. Do you think they'd stand there and pray — instead of makin' at us, if it wasn't a real god?

JOHN. But they're heathens.

ISAAC. That doesn't matter. Their god stays their hand, same — same as ours does!

JOHN (*incredulous*). The same as ours!

ISAAC. We shouldn't have done it, John!

[The priests suddenly drop to their knees, their foreheads touching the floor.]

JOHN (*impetuously, stepping back*). I don't like it!

ORRIN (*with an uneasy sneer*). Haven't got their sea legs yet, seems if. . . .

JOHN. It isn't right for them to take on so, praying to a god who — who isn't there!

ISAAC. He is here.

JOHN. Good God — Isaac . . .

ISAAC. He's on this ship.

ORRIN. It's a lie! It's questioning a man's honesty! How do you know?

ISAAC. I feel its power — here. Have you ever seen our God when you've prayed to him? It's the same thing — perhaps they're both the same. (*In amazement.*) John! I think — I understand.

ORRIN. Hold off such talkin', will you? It's queer . . .

[The door, right, opens, and the captain, David Shaw, enters. He is a young man of about twenty-five, whose haggard appearance does not entirely eclipse his strong straight bearing. He carries a small swathed bundle. He walks, as if in his sleep, as far as the altar, and stops, as if unable to go farther. Isaac stands still, incapable of motion. John and Orrin draw themselves up in attitudes of mild deference. John looks apprehensively from the still kneeling priests to the captain; Orrin looks curiously at the bundle, starts to say something but does not.]

LACQUER AND JADE

ISAAC (*choked with the words*). Ruth? (*David looks at him blankly.*) Is Ruth . . .

DAVID (*tonelessly*). She's sleeping. (*Isaac looks at him in terror. Less numbly.*) She's well. She'll be doing smartly, Isaac.

ISAAC (*exultantly, clapping both hands down on David's shoulders*). She's well! Thank heavens, she's well! (*Turning to John and Orrin.*) She's well, do you hear, she's smart! (*John takes his hand and shakes it excitedly, drops it and turns to grasp Orrin's. Isaac, leaning up against the table, laughs unrestrainedly. The priests raise their heads at the sound, and kneel erect. Isaac stops suddenly, speaks with apologetic eagerness.*) She's well — she's come through! David! It's over! She's out of it!

[*He laughs.*]

DAVID (*tonelessly, jerking forward his laden arms.*) It's dead.

[*Isaac's laughter stops abruptly. John and Orrin's clasped hands fall apart. A deep silence.*]

ISAAC (*unbelieving*). Dead!

DAVID. It never — was alive. I tried . . . (*Passionately.*) It's not right for a man to be working with life — it's too big — and nothing to steer by!

ORRIN (*muttering*). It's bad — it's bad . . .

DAVID. It's no thing for a man. Ruth knew how to do till the last. . . .

ISAAC. We heard her — crying.

DAVID. It's a terrible thing, Isaac Evening. I'd take all Hatt'ras storms than go through with it. There's not anything in this world yet I'd take to be a woman in her time.

ISAAC (*looking down at the child, wonderingly*). It's so small — and it's dead.

JOHN (*to Orrin*). We should 've known we'd get our goin' home a-crying — stealing a god.

ORRIN (*hotly*). Don't you dare say stealing! You . . .

LACQUER AND JADE

JOHN. It's next to the same thing.

ISAAC. She'll take it hard, David.

DAVID. She doesn't know yet. I hadn't — I couldn't . . .

ISAAC. No.

DAVID. I couldn't have stayed in there with it, and her not knowing. (*Pause.*) 'Twill be hell to tell her.

ISAAC (*to himself*). I shall have my first born, she'd say. . . .

DAVID. It takes them queer sometimes, when the child — when . . .

ISAAC. But you said she was well!

DAVID. Yes. She came through it hale as can be. But I wasn't allotted to have them both, I guess. (*Flaring.*) It's not fair! It's not right that the child should go — after all her misery.

ISAAC. It's like losing off the mast to save the ship. You saved her to bear your others, David.

DAVID. I'm no hand at such work, God knows I'm not. It was my fault, might be. That's the worst of it.

ISAAC. You did your best.

DAVID. I don't know. Whatever I did for it, 'twas no use. (*He lays the child down on the empty altar. He buries his face in his hands.*) It was a son.

[*David steps nearer him, puts his hands on his shoulders, but turns his face away from him, struggling for composure. A silence. The priests surge toward the altar, stand looking at the child.*]

JOHN. It's hard for a man. . . .

ORRIN. He's got cause to feel bad, I can tell you. It's all on his hands if the ship runs bad luck, with a death aboard. He got us into it. They can't put the blame on us, first . . .

JOHN. It's not a good feeling to have it, that's certain. And those Chinamen here, with their notions. Look at them, crawling up and peering at the poor creature!

ORRIN. They look as if they had something afoot. Seems if they knew more'n they'd ever tell — and could use it

LACQUER AND JADE

against us . . . (*The priests shrink hastily back from the altar, consternation on their faces, their fingers racing over their rosaries. They turn to each other in whispered conference. Fearfully.*) Do they ever eat people?

JOHN. Lands, no! That's the islanders. (*Doubtfully.*) I don't think so.

ORRIN. They look as if they might — now. They look as if they might do anything ye hear tales of. If bad luck comes, 'twill be through them. You mark my words.

JOHN. We can only wait. There's no telling. . . .

ORRIN. I don't like it, their talkin' like that — secret. I don't like it at all! Do ye think what we did . . .

[*The priests walk again to the altar. The leader bends over the baby, his face near it, looking at it intently. Isaac's hand grips David's shoulder tightly. David turns, they both stare in fright at the priest as he leans down and places a hand on either side of the baby. All three men lunge forward. Isaac holds David back.*]

ISAAC. Let him be! It's the work of the jade god.

JOHN. Stop him, Isaac, hold him! They'll burn it perhaps, with their ways. There's no knowing . . .

ORRIN. 'Twould come on us sure, if they did. We'd never see home with our cargo. There was a ship went down once, all hands, for tamperin' with the dead. (*Weakly.*) Though I don't gen'rally hold with such beliefs . . .

ISAAC (*sharply*). If there's ill luck comes, it's our doing, not . . .

[*The priest takes the child, kneels, holding him on the flat of his two palms, as if an offering.*]

DAVID (*pulling away*). It's my son. They can't do it to him!

ISAAC. There's nothing you can do against them. Let them be, David Shaw.

JOHN. Are ye mad?

LACQUER AND JADE

ISAAC. No, I'm not. Hold your tongue.

ORRIN (*aghast*). We'll be killed with the bad luck they're puttin' on us. A man wouldn't believe such things unless he saw it. I'll not be sent to the bottom, and my pay not spent — not if I can help it.

[*He hastens out, left. John starts after him, the door closes in his face.*]

JOHN. Ye can't sneak out like that! Dirty white-livered coward!

ISAAC. Let him go.

[*His voice trails away as the priests close in a circle around the one holding the child, so that it cannot be seen. John crosses, back, over to David and Isaac.*]

JOHN. Isaac, what will they do?

DAVID. It's my boy and they can't take and harm him that way — while we stand . . . Let me go!

ISAAC (*quietly*). Your son is dead, David.

DAVID (*dropping back limply*). Aye. . . .

JOHN. He's a Amine born child for all that. You can't let those heathens — you can't give them leave . . .

DAVID. I won't have him mauled so, living or dead! (*To the priests.*) Take your yellow heathen hands off him! I'll have him from you!

ISAAC. Keep your peace, you fool!

DAVID. I'll take none of your backwash.

ISAAC. You'll not rile these Chinese, if you know what's good. They're aboard here for a reason.

DAVID. Damn the whole lot of them!

ISAAC. We'll be put in irons back in Canton if you don't treat them right. (*David is sullen.*) And then who'd care for Ruth?

JOHN. They'll not get to her now!

[*He stands in front of door, right.*]

DAVID (*still looking at the priests*). But they have him by the heels! They're swinging him! It's cruel!

JOHN (*in surprised recognition*). They're swinging him?

LACQUER AND JADE

[*His eyes meet Isaac's in puzzled inquiry.*]

ISAAC (*groping*). They did that—I heard tell of that . . .

JOHN. 'Twas in the village . . .

ISAAC. 'Twas something good.

DAVID. Will you let them do that, and breathe on its mouth, and not . . .

JOHN (*excitedly*). Aye, and breathe on its mouth . . .

ISAAC. What is it? It will save us! Can't you think?

DAVID. What will save us?

ISAAC. If only Ben were here—he'd know, right off.

JOHN. Ben's wife . . . (*He pauses, thinking.*) Ben's wife—her first child—it was born without breathing . . .

ISAAC. And they swung it in the air—and they breathed on its mouth . . .

JOHN. And it . . .

ISAAC. And it lived!

DAVID. It lived? (*They look at each other in incredulous hope. Silence.*) It came to life? They're doing that—for us?

ISAAC (*softly*). They're doing that—for their jade god.

JOHN. They're making out it isn't death—to break the evil.

ISAAC. And if it isn't death . . .

DAVID. If it's true . . .

ISAAC (*heavily*). It can't be. It's been—dead—too long. (*In prayer.*) Our God—their God—for Ruth's sake!

DAVID. How long before ye know? (*A waiting pause.*) Are ye sure that's what they're doing?

ISAAC. No.

DAVID. But good Lord . . .

[*Isaac is staring at the priests in feverish intensity; his fingers moving together as if telling a rosary.*]

JOHN. It should be soon—if it's to be.

LACQUER AND JADE

DAVID. There's nothing a body can do!

JOHN. Nothing but wait. It should 've been done sooner.

[There is a swift motion through the group of priests, and a tense silence, which the sudden sound of a thin wail makes the more electric.]

DAVID. Is that . . . is it? *(Again the wail. The group of priests opens; the leader kneels again, facing front, raising the child, as before, on the palms of his hands, but this time grasped more firmly. The others hover over him. In hushed awe.)* Lord Almighty!

JOHN *(solemnly)*. Lord's will be done!

ISAAC *(gasps)*. Amen.

[He steps back, as if from majesty, leans weakly against the door, right. David steps tentatively forward toward the priests. The leader half turns, and stands facing him with the baby.]

ISAAC *(covers his eyes with his hand)*. It's too bright — it's too bright!

[The priest holds out the child to David, who stands stupidly.]

JOHN. Take it, quick, while you can!

DAVID *(looking down at it, wondering)*. It's come alive — as right as rain. *(To John.)* Is it true?

JOHN. Take it!

[The door, left, opens slowly; Orrin slips from behind it, the idol under his arm. He looks toward the group who stand forward, left of center, with their backs to him. He does not notice Isaac leaning against the door, right forward, with covered eyes. He advances stealthily, with eyes on the group, to the altar. David takes the baby awkwardly.]

DAVID *(in wonder)*. A son. My son.

[The head priest, with an air of incantation, sounds the cymbals softly over the head of the child, while the others gather around it, murmuring prayers. David stands very still; John draws nearer him, protectingly. Isaac raises

LACQUER AND JADE

his head at the sound of the cymbals. Orrin has just reached the altar. Their eyes meet. Isaac's head tilts up in a proud gesture.

ORRIN (*defensively*). I wasn't aiming to see us killed by the luck they brought. I wasn't going to let anything happen — not if I . . .

ISAAC. The child is alive. You've no cause to be afraid.

ORRIN (*dismayed*). Alive? You mean it came alive without my . . .

ISAAC (*as if to himself*). Lacquer and jade — Lacquer and jade it has saved her.

ORRIN (*hostilely*). How long has it been living?

ISAAC. Since the priests . . . (*Pointedly.*) ever since you sneaked off.

ORRIN. Then it would have lived anyway — even if I hadn't — even if I'd kept . . . (*Isaac pulls himself straight, in scorn; he looks across the altar in stern disdain at Orrin, and points to the altar in an imperious gesture. Orrin looks furtively at the priests, who have stopped their incantations and have drawn back in a group, away from David. Hastily he puts the idol on the altar, stands with both hands lingeringly on it, then jerks away. In fretful fury.*) God damn it!

[*Isaac lunges across the altar with straight armed force and pushes him strongly back. He staggers, but keeps his balance, and stands glowering at Isaac. The priests begin to move slowly, with bowed heads, to the altar. Isaac moves aside, Orrin shrinks farther back. David turns and follows them with his eyes, but does not move. They come to the altar. The leader raises his head and sees the idol; he stares at it steadfastly, but without surprise. Then, for the first time, he looks directly at the men. His gaze travels with cold firmness to Orrin, who glares back with bravado, then turns away. His eyes turn and hold Isaac's. Isaac looks steadily back, with a slow grave smile, as if of recognition. Suddenly the priest turns from them to the altar, and all of them swiftly kneel, in silence. David looks*

LACQUER AND JADE

at them, and then at his son. He falls to his knees where he stands, as if he could stand no longer. Isaac, his eyes fixed on the altar, kneels quickly, bows his head suddenly into his hands. John, looking from one to the other, kneels slowly and awkwardly. He bows his head, and folds his arms across his chest. Orrin stands withdrawn, looking down at the idol sullenly, from behind the altar, as the

Curtain Falls.

RIGHT ABOUT FACE

By

DELLA VAN DEUSEN

Copyright, 1940, by Samuel French.

CAST

NANCY HOLDEN.

CHARLOTTE HOLDEN.

GRANDMOTHER HOLDEN.

FATHER, *Charles Holden.*

MOTHER, *Elizabeth Holden.*

GEORGE HOLDEN.

HARRY, *the Holdens' man-of-all-work.*

SCENE. Sitting room in the Holden home.

TIME. An afternoon in 2989 A. D.

Setting and costumes to be left to the discretion of the designer, who will produce his idea of what is likely to be the fashion in the world of day after tomorrow. (And wouldn't it be strange if things were not so very different from today?)

RIGHT ABOUT FACE

As the curtain rises Nancy Holden, a girl of thirteen or fourteen, is sitting at a study table, opposite her sister Charlotte, a young woman of twenty-two. Evidently Charlotte has been hearing lessons, for Nancy, with an air of relief, hands her a paper on which she has been figuring.

NANCY. There, that's the last. Now, while you mark it, I'll get in a swim before dinner.

CHARLOTTE. Not so fast! There's still the history outline.

NANCY (*guiltily*). Oh, I don't see why . . .

CHARLOTTE. You haven't prepared the lesson!

NANCY (*sulkily*). Oh, what's the use of ancient history, anyway?

CHARLOTTE. Nancy! If you keep on this way, your mind will be as ignorant and undisciplined as a boy's. Of course there's use in ancient history. How can people think clearly today if they don't know the past experience of the human race? Everything we do now is built on the past, just as the future will be built on today.

NANCY. I suppose so. But it's an awful bore.

CHARLOTTE (*firmly*). That doesn't let you out. (*Opens the book and hands it to her.*) Read it over to me now, and you can study it after dinner.

NANCY (*reading mechanically but clearly*). "The early years of the 20th Century witnessed what was known as the World War, followed in 1941(?) by the Last War, which brought about the end of civilization as it was then known. This war, lasting five years, very nearly wiped out the male population of the world and took a heavy toll among women and children. The subsequent years of disorder led to the Conflict Between the Sexes,

RIGHT ABOUT FACE

through which the women, being greatly in the majority, gained control and brought about our present civilization. This Conflict Between the Sexes is, perhaps, a rather shameful page in the history of women, who were forced in the interests of peace and equitable government to take up arms against fathers, brothers and husbands; but the results of the struggle must be the justification of the means employed. As early as the year 2050 women found themselves in complete charge of the world's affairs. Naturally the first flush of victory produced many excesses and abuses and for several centuries the position of the male was little better than that of a slave. The scarcity of men also made necessary a type of protective polygamy, but as populations increased this gradually was abandoned and romantic love and monogamy became possible. During the last five hundred years man's status has risen, until it now very nearly equals that of woman . . ." (*Breaking off.*)

Charlotte, what's protective polygamy?

CHARLOTTE. It means that when the men were so scarce there were three or four wives for every husband.

NANCY. Ha! I can't imagine Mother sharing Father with several other women.

CHARLOTTE. Neither can I. Of course it isn't necessary now. But morals vary with the needs of civilization. The race must survive.

NANCY. Why?

CHARLOTTE. That's a foolish question!

NANCY. I know . . . but why?

CHARLOTTE. Because . . . because . . . Oh, don't be silly! When you're a woman you'll understand. . . . Go on with your lesson.

[*But at this moment there is the sound of an airplane outside and Nancy flings down the book and runs to the window.*]

NANCY. Here comes Granny!

RIGHT ABOUT FACE

CHARLOTTE. Oh . . . in that case you may as well get your swim. I want to talk with Granny.

NANCY. And I know what about! Poor Georgie!

CHARLOTTE (*trying to be severe, but laughing in spite of herself*). You overhear too much. If you'd just leave your poor brother alone and apply that mighty intellect to your studies . . . Oh, well, run along!

[*Nancy goes out. Enter Granny, an imposing dowager with an air of command.*]

GRANNY. Well, well . . . Charlotte, my dear, how are you? Didn't I hear that small sister of yours?

CHARLOTTE. She made you an excuse for escaping further lessons. I'm trying to coach her for examinations, but it's a thankless task. She's like quicksilver.

GRANNY. Humph! Didn't get that from *my* side of the family. Must come through your father . . . he was a flighty sort of boy.

CHARLOTTE (*warmly*). Father's a dear! I wouldn't have him different.

GRANNY. So he is, so he is . . . and neither would I. Besides, he settled down very sensibly — made your mother a nice domestic husband, after all. Where is he, by the way? (*Indulgently.*) Off at his baseball club, I suppose.

CHARLOTTE (*laughing*). No, the club met yesterday.

GRANNY. These men and the pleasure they get from anything that can be knocked or thrown about! Well, it's a harmless form of amusement, so long as they don't neglect their homes. And I will say for your father that he's a good housekeeper. Where is he, my dear?

CHARLOTTE. Out in the kitchen, I think. Shall I call him?

GRANNY. No, no, not yet. I want a word with you first. But what's he doing in the kitchen? Has the cook left?

CHARLOTTE. Oh, no, Harry's still with us. But you know how Father fusses.

RIGHT ABOUT FACE

GRANNY (*amused*). Your grandfather was like that . . . men are all the same. I suppose he's concocting some special dish for your mother . . . and she's too tender-hearted to tell him she'd rather have plain meat and potatoes.

CHARLOTTE (*a little stiffly*). Mother really likes his cooking. She's always talking about the days when he used to do it all.

GRANNY. Ah, yes, ah, yes . . . (*Musingly.*) Those first days of marriage . . . There's something very sweet about coming home every day to a little new house and a happy young bridegroom. But we all like to indulge our husbands as soon as we can . . . we wouldn't want to go on that way all our lives.

CHARLOTTE. I wouldn't even like to start that way. I'll not marry at all until I can give my husband what he's been accustomed to.

GRANNY. Don't agree with you . . . don't agree with you at all! Young men should have something to do . . . keeps 'em out of mischief. Look at the idle young fellows, nowadays, gadding around playing baseball and football and polo, neglecting their wives, neglecting their homes and children! First thing women know, they'll find themselves at home doing the housework.

[*Charlotte laughs heartily, as though at an impossible picture. Even Granny does not take her own words too seriously.*]

CHARLOTTE. You said you wanted a word with me?

GRANNY. Yes, I do. What's all this talk I hear about your brother breaking his engagement?

CHARLOTTE. O Lord! Is it all over town so soon?

GRANNY (*testily*). That's a pretty compliment to me! A delicate family matter — and when I hear it from outsiders, you know it must be all over town!

CHARLOTTE. We wanted to consult you, Granny, but Father thought . . .

GRANNY. Your father *thought!* Do you mean to tell

RIGHT ABOUT FACE

me that you and your mother, two women of sense and discretion, acted on the so-called *thoughts* of a silly man?

CHARLOTTE (*with dignity*). Father isn't a silly person, Granny . . . and after all, he *is* George's parent, too, you know. Mother and I thought we could keep it hushed up until Georgie came to his senses.

GRANNY. Nonsense! You ought to know what boys are. He confided in his chum, that Beardsley boy. Naturally, the Beardsley boy told his father . . . and everything *that* man hears goes in both ears and out his mouth. Well! What's it all about? Why did he do it?

CHARLOTTE. Don't ask me! I never could get anything out of George. As a matter of fact, I don't believe even Alice knows. He just suddenly upped and broke it off, for no reason at all that I can see. Said he found his feelings had changed and he couldn't go through with it.

GRANNY. Ridiculous! They've been sweethearts ever since they were children.

CHARLOTTE. We all think there must be someone else.

GRANNY. Of course. What other reason could he have? How is Alice taking it?

CHARLOTTE. Oh, naturally she's pretty much broken up. She's been in love with him for years, and it was all settled and seemed to be going on so well. . . . But she's behaving very decently. Says she wants him to be happy, and if that's the way he feels there's nothing she can do about it.

GRANNY. Tommyrot! In *my* day young women didn't take "no" for an answer so easily.

CHARLOTTE. Yes, Granny, but times *have* changed. Women nowadays don't *force* men to marry them.

GRANNY. Women nowadays are a lot of weak fools. Men wrap them around their little fingers. Yes, and your mother's as bad as the rest of 'em, letting your father spoil that boy until he doesn't know his own mind from

RIGHT ABOUT FACE

one day to another. I'll have a word or two with that young jackanapes!

CHARLOTTE. That might be a good idea. But here comes Father. . . . Don't say anything to disturb him, Gran. He hasn't seemed very well lately.

[*Enter Father, a large, rawboned man with a gentle, patient manner.*]

GRANNY. Well, well, Charlie, come in, come in! Charlotte tells me you're ailing.

FATHER. How are you, Mother Holden? Glad to see you. Don't believe everything my family tells you . . . they all like to spoil me.

CHARLOTTE. Now, Daddy, you know the doctor said you were run down and shouldn't do so much.

GRANNY. Very sensible advice. Perfectly ridiculous, the way men fuss over their housekeeping. You just keep off your feet and take a good rest, Charlie. What would Elizabeth do if anything happened to you?

FATHER (*smiling humorously*). I daresay she'd marry again.

GRANNY. Nonsense, my boy, I didn't mean to suggest *that!* Don't be so sensitive. And you mustn't get laid up . . . though I suppose George *could* take care of the house, couldn't he? (*As Father remains silent she repeats sharply.*) *Couldn't he?*

FATHER (*rousing himself*). Eh? Oh . . . why, yes, I guess so.

GRANNY. Guess so? D'you mean he could or d'you mean he couldn't? I suppose you've been letting him waste his time strumming the piano instead of helping you. Can't think why Elizabeth allows it.

FATHER (*with a twinkle*). Well, Mother, you know you just said that men fuss too much over their housekeeping.

[*Father evidently has charm, for Granny is restored to good humor.*]

GRANNY. Ha, ha! How you do twist my words . . .

RIGHT ABOUT FACE

regular man's trick! Just for that, my boy, I'll stay to dinner and sample this wonderful dish I hear you've been making for Elizabeth.

[*Pats Father's shoulder.*]

FATHER (*polite but not enthusiastic*). Why, yes, that'll be fine. I'll go and tell Harry. (*Father starts to leave the room, but meets Mother coming in and stops. Mother is a small, dainty person with a bright, happy manner.*) Betty! You're home early. Is anything wrong?

MOTHER (*patting Father's shoulder*). Such an anxious man! No, no, everything is all right . . . at least as all right as it can be, the way business is going these days. Anyway, the office was so quiet that there didn't seem any point in staying there all day. I thought I'd give you a little surprise.

FATHER (*putting her into a chair*). A very nice one! But your feet are wet. I'll get your slippers. (*He fetches slippers, kneels and removing Mother's shoes, puts them on her feet.*) How in the deuce did you manage to get so wet? You must have put the plane down in the swamp again. I wish you'd be more careful!

MOTHER (*patting him soothingly*). Such an old worrier!

GRANNY. Charlotte and I have just been telling him he fusses too much over you all.

CHARLOTTE (*who apparently is fond of her father, laying a caressing hand on his shoulder*). Never you mind, Daddy! I like being fussed over.

GRANNY. That's right, girl. Always stand up for your father.

FATHER (*drily*). Yes, remember the old song: "A Girl's Best Friend Is Her Father."

GRANNY (*displeased by his ironical tone*). Well, really, Charles, I see no reason for adopting that tone. Sarcasm isn't very manly.

FATHER. So many things aren't.

GRANNY. Why, Charlie, this is unlike you. (*To Charlotte.*) I see what you meant. He certainly *isn't* well.

RIGHT ABOUT FACE

Charlie, dear, why don't you run out and tell Harry I'll be here for dinner?

FATHER (*perversely*). I'll tell him later.

GRANNY. Well, why don't you go and lie down or something? Aren't you supposed to rest a good deal?

FATHER. It rests me to sit here with Betty.

[*Mother beams. Obviously she is extremely fond of Father.*]

GRANNY. Betty and I have a little matter to discuss, Charlie.

FATHER (*unabashed*). I suppose you mean George. I'd scarcely call that a *little* matter.

GRANNY (*joyful and conciliatory*). He is a fine big fellow, isn't he?

FATHER. That isn't exactly what I meant.

GRANNY (*not caring a whit what he meant, so long as she can get him out of the room*). No, no, I suppose not. Isn't that Nancy calling you?

FATHER. I don't hear anything.

GRANNY (*cocking her head to listen*). Well, maybe it's Harry. Something must have gone wrong in the kitchen.

FATHER (*calmly*). Nothing that will get me out of the room while you discuss George.

GRANNY. Well . . . I . . . really . . . Elizabeth, are you going to sit there and let him talk like that?

MOTHER (*mildly*). Charlie and I always consult each other about the children, Mother. He has a right to hear what we say about George.

GRANNY. A right? Good gracious, there's too much talk about men's rights these days. First thing we know they'll be wanting to vote. (*Laughs at her own joke and goes on, with good humor restored.*) Very well, very well, Charlie my dear, stay if you want to. Now, Elizabeth, what's this about George breaking his engagement? Why wasn't I told?

MOTHER. Well, Charlie and I both felt that the boy should be allowed to consult his own heart.

RIGHT ABOUT FACE

GRANNY. Humph! That sounds like Charlie's idea. What about his consulting his head? Young as she is, Alice is making money hand over fist. She'll provide well for him.

MOTHER (*quickly*). I can provide for my own children, thank you! No son of mine need ever marry just for a home.

GRANNY (*impatiently*). Of course not, of course not! Nobody's suggesting such a thing. But he'll have to marry some time . . . and he won't get another girl like Alice in a hurry.

FATHER (*with suppressed indignation*). Must he get anyone in a hurry?

GRANNY. Now, Charlie, be sensible! Naturally you want to keep him with you as long as you can. I understand that and it does credit to your Father Heart. But I can't believe you want him to be an old bachelor.

FATHER (*stiffly*). There are worse things.

GRANNY. That's all very well for you to say, happily married and with your children around you. But give a moment's thought to Charlotte. *She's* the one who would have to take care of you and George if anything should happen to Elizabeth.

CHARLOTTE (*loyally*). Of course I'd take care of them, Gran, and be glad to.

GRANNY (*sagely*). So you think now, my girl . . . but wait until you're married and see how your husband likes a piano-playing brother-in-law around the house.

FATHER (*drily*). Don't forget the piano-playing father-in-law.

GRANNY. Oh, my dear boy, don't be so sensitive! You've let your practising go until I forgot that you ever played at all.

[*Father winces and seems about to reply, when Mother speaks.*]

MOTHER (*humorously*). Well, between you all, you've disposed of me pretty thoroughly. (*Father grins ap-*

RIGHT ABOUT FACE

preciatively. It is apparent that he and Mother enjoy their jokes together. Granny and Charlotte see nothing funny in the speech. Continuing.) I hope it will comfort you for my hypothetical demise, if I tell you that Charlie and George will be provided for.

GRANNY. That's not the point, Elizabeth. You know the kind of times we're living in. George ought to be *settled*.

FATHER. Suppose he doesn't want to be settled.

GRANNY. A boy that age doesn't know *what* he wants. It's one thing today and another tomorrow.

FATHER (*determinedly*). George does. He wants to go on with his music.

GRANNY. Good Heavens! (*Turning to Mother.*) Elizabeth, are you encouraging this insanity?

MOTHER (*rather sheepishly*). Well, I've always thought music was a nice accomplishment for a boy.

GRANNY. Of course it is, of course it is! Nothing draws the young women about a boy like a bit of piano playing. But only as an accomplishment! Girls don't like a man who plays too well.

MOTHER (*good-naturedly*). Here now, Mother, Charlie played beautifully when he was a boy and there wasn't a greater beau in town. Remember what a struggle I had to carry him off?

[*She beams affectionately at Father.*]

GRANNY. I'll admit Charlie played well. But when the babies came along he had sense enough to give it up. A man can't mix music and matrimony.

FATHER. Maybe that's why George doesn't want to get married.

GRANNY. Nonsense! Every normal young man wants a wife and family. George may think he doesn't now, but he will later on . . . when it's too late to pick up anything but a crooked stick. I'll have a talk with the young fool. It's time somebody in this family put her foot down.

RIGHT ABOUT FACE

FATHER (*apprehensively*). Be careful what you say to him. George is extremely high spirited.

[*As Granny snorts choleric disapproval, George enters. He, like Father, is large and raw-boned, but instead of being gently patient, his manner is brimming with nervous energy. He carries a roll of music.*]

GEORGE. Hi, everybody! Hello, Granny, did I hear someone say I was high spirited? I'll tell the world! Wait'll you hear my news!

GRANNY (*with satisfaction*). Oh, so you've made it up with Alice! (*To Father.*) What did I tell you, Charlie? (*Turning back to George.*) Well, my boy, you have more sense than I thought.

GEORGE (*somewhat dashed, but still carried away with whatever is on his mind*). No, it's not Alice, Gran. That's all over. This is something else and . . . O Girl! wait'll you hear it!

GRANNY (*disapproving, but willing to be reasonable*). Someone else, you mean . . . you fickle young thing! Come on, out with it! Tell us about her!

GEORGE (*sidetracked and anxious to continue his story*). No, Granny, there's no one else, honestly. Wait'll you . . .

FATHER (*speaking quickly, before Granny can explode*). George! You've won the contest!

GEORGE. Aw, Pop! Why couldn't you let me tell 'em? (*But he is too radiantly happy to be resentful.*) Well, anyway, there's more to it than just the prize. I've won . . .

GRANNY. What contest? What prize? I suppose you mean one of those radio soap things. Really, I don't see . . .

GEORGE (*excitedly*). Radio nothing! It's the Conservatory contest for composition . . . and my tone poem won first place. One hundred bucks, Gran! And . . .

GRANNY (*impressed by the cash*). Why, that's very nice, Georgie. I didn't know you wrote poetry.

RIGHT ABOUT FACE

GEORGE. Not poetry, Gran, a musical tone poem. Listen!

[He rushes to the piano and plays a few bars of whatever the pianist fancies will be the music of day after tomorrow.]

GRANNY. Hm . . . very nice, very pretty. Not quite a hundred dollars' worth, to my way of thinking, but no doubt the judges wanted to please your mother . . . perhaps she gives them a discount or something.

GEORGE (*indignantly*). She wouldn't do such a thing, and neither would they! Besides (*Drawing himself up in triumph.*) that isn't all. *I won the Caricat Scholarship!* The first man who ever got it!

FATHER (*almost stunned with delight*). *George!*

MOTHER (*humorously*). If that means that you can keep on with your lessons without my paying for them, I must say I am delighted.

GEORGE. It means more than that. It means I go to the city for three years' study.

MOTHER (*skeptically*). All expenses paid?

GEORGE (*hesitating a little*). All my teachers' fees. Of course there'll be living expenses, but they won't amount to much . . . not much more than you've been paying for my lessons right here. And . . .

MOTHER (*laughing*). Not so fast, not so fast, young man! (*To Father.*) Charlie, dear, I do wish you'd try to keep him from getting his heart so set on things.

GEORGE (*aghast and incredulous*). Mother! You mean you won't send me?

GRANNY. I should hope not! The idea of a boy your age going alone and unprotected to the city . . . why, it's preposterous!

GEORGE (*impatiently*). Oh, Lord, Gran! What on earth could happen to me?

GRANNY. I *hope* you're too innocent to know! It ought to be enough for me to tell you it's impossible.

GEORGE (*rebelliously*). Well, it isn't enough. Besides, Mother hasn't said it was impossible, have you, Mother?

RIGHT ABOUT FACE

GRANNY (*quickly, before Mother can speak*). She will, if she has half the sense I credit her with. Go to the city, indeed! A fine pass the world is coming to, with young boys traipsing off hither and yon. In my day, young fellows were content to stay at home with their families until the right woman came along.

GEORGE Your day . . .

FATHER (*warningly*). George!

[*George stops.*]

GRANNY. And you, young man, ought to be ashamed to want to add another burden to the load your busy, hard-working mother is carrying.

GEORGE (*exasperated*). But I've just explained that it won't be much more than she's paying for me already. And the hundred dollar prize . . .

MOTHER (*kindly, but firmly*). I'm afraid that wouldn't go very far in the city, Georgie. You couldn't stay just anywhere, you know, and a suitable place for you to live would be expensive. No, my dear, I'm sorry to disappoint you, but Granny is right. I couldn't afford it.

GEORGE (*angrily*). You can afford to send Nancy away to school.

CHARLOTTE (*attempting to soothe him*). But Georgie, dear, that's different. Nancy is a girl.

GEORGE. You needn't remind *me* that she's a girl. I get it rubbed in often enough. (*Bitterly.*) She's a girl, so she gets sent away to expensive schools and colleges, while I . . . It isn't even as though she needed specialized training. She'll never have a thought or ambition outside business.

GRANNY. See here, young jackanapes, don't start in belittling business. It's business that has given you a lovely home and good clothes and advantages that most boys would be thankful to have.

GEORGE (*sulkily*). Well, business doesn't seem to be sending me to the city.

MOTHER (*laughing indulgently and patting his cheek*).

RIGHT ABOUT FACE

Now, now, puppy, what do you think you really could do if you did go?

GEORGE (*eagerly*). I could study and work and learn to be a real musician, maybe a composer. You don't seem to understand about the Caricat Scholarship, Mother. It's the biggest thing that can happen to anyone who wants to be a professional.

GRANNY (*groaning*). Oh, my God! Now he wants to be a professional! A male, professional musician! Nice kind of thing to have in the family!

GEORGE (*rounding on her defiantly*). What's so awful about it? There are lots of men professionals. Besides, you'll think it's pretty fine some day when I'm famous.

GRANNY (*laughing in spite of herself*). Listen to the boy! Famous! I know, Georgie, I know . . . there are men professionals. And look at 'em! Second raters, every one. Much better be a first-rate house-husband and father. There never *has* been a great man artist or scientist. They haven't the capacity . . . brains aren't built that way.

GEORGE. Well, good Heavens, Gran, give 'em time! They've only been allowed to do those things for the last two or three hundred years.

GRANNY (*sagely*). If they'd really wanted to, they'd have found a way before that.

GEORGE. Well, *I* really want to!

GRANNY. Oh, my gracious, it's no use arguing with men; they always come back to the personal.

GEORGE. Besides, men used to be composers . . . once. Back in the days before the Conflict of the Sexes there were lots of them. That's one of the things I'm interested in. They've found . . .

GRANNY. If you're talking about those trumpery phonograph disks they've been digging up in the ruins of New York, I can't believe anyone takes *them* seriously.

GEORGE. A lot of the most brilliant *women* are taking

RIGHT ABOUT FACE

them seriously! Why, there's a regular Renaissance taking place, and I want to be in on it!

GRANNY. Renaissance fiddlesticks! Degeneration is a better word for it. (*Turning to Mother and Charlotte.*) I tell you, Elizabeth, and you, too, Charlotte, these are dangerous times. When a civilization has to hark back to the prehistoric for new ideas, well, it's pretty close to being decadent. This so-called music . . .

GEORGE (*interrupting*). Hey! Listen to this! (*He dashes to the piano and pounds out part of a Rachmaninov Prelude.*) There! What do you think of *that*?

GRANNY. I think it's cheap, mannish stuff that will sap the vitality of this nation if it's allowed to continue . . . which it won't, because there are others who feel as I do. And your mother and I will see that *you* have no more of it.

GEORGE (*shouting*). I *will* have more of it! And it can't be stopped. It's a movement . . . see? . . . and it will go on, no matter what you and a lot of other old harridans think!

[*There is a moment's stunned silence.*]

MOTHER (*at the top of her voice*). George! Apologize to your grandmother! (*As George remains stubbornly silent.*) *At once!*

GEORGE (*frightened, but still defiant*). I apologize for being rude to Grandmother, but I meant every word I said.

GRANNY (*with terrible and icy calm*). Well, Elizabeth, I hope *now* you realize what subversive influences have been at work on your son!

FATHER (*who has been standing by in anxious silence*). Go to your room, George. I'll talk with you later.

[*George, with a grateful look at Father, flings out of the room.*]

GRANNY. Talk with him! Talk *with* him! So that's what you're going to do! Well, it's right in line with

RIGHT ABOUT FACE

the way you've always spoiled him. The boy's completely out of hand. Elizabeth, I hope for once you'll assert yourself. Shut him up on bread and water, until he comes to his senses and marries Alice.

CHARLOTTE (*putting her arm around the old lady's shoulders*). Come now, Granny, people don't do those things nowadays.

GRANNY (*relentlessly*). More's the pity.

CHARLOTTE. Georgie isn't a bad boy, just high strung and nervous . . . and being a man, he flies off the handle easily. He'll be ever so sorry for this, once he's cooled down.

MOTHER. Charlotte is right, Mother. We mustn't take a boy's tantrum too seriously.

GRANNY (*grimly*). Perhaps you didn't hear what he called me!

MOTHER. I know . . . I know . . . and he shall be punished. No more music lessons from now on.

[*Father makes an impulsive movement, then checks himself.*]

GRANNY (*somewhat mollified*). Well, that's better . . . now we're getting somewhere. And I'd dispose of the piano, too.

FATHER (*with unexpected spirit*). The piano is mine.

GRANNY (*irritated again*). What if it is? That needn't stop Elizabeth from selling it. I must say, Charles, I am very much displeased with your attitude. (*Angrily.*) I'll not stay for dinner, after all. I'll eat at the Club.

FATHER (*imperturbably*). Very well, Mother Holden. (*Granny, somewhat taken aback at not being urged to stay, glares belligerently at everyone in turn, then stumps out. Calmly.*) Charlotte, will you please find Nancy and make sure that she washes her hands before dinner?

CHARLOTTE (*laughing*). I certainly will. She's probably grubby beyond belief.

RIGHT ABOUT FACE

[Charlotte goes out. Father sighs deeply and sinks dejectedly into a chair.

MOTHER (*patting his shoulder*). There now, Charles, don't take this to heart. Mother's bark is worse than her bite, you know, and she's really very fond of you. She won't be angry long.

FATHER (*sitting up with an air of determination*). Elizabeth, you didn't really mean what you said about stopping George's lessons, did you?

MOTHER (*laughing*). Oh, I suppose the two of you will get around me eventually, but for the present . . . really, you know, we can't let him get away with a performance like today's. Mother is right, Charlie, he is shockingly spoiled, though I don't know but that I'm as much to blame as you. (*Laughing again.*) The young rascal has a mighty wheedling way with him.

FATHER (*gravely*). I think it would be a mistake to stop his lessons, just when he's getting on so nicely.

MOTHER. Best time in the world to stop . . . teach him a lesson he won't forget in a hurry. We'll lock the piano, too, and forbid him to practise for a month.

FATHER. No!

MOTHER (*astonished*). What's that you say?

FATHER. I said, no. You can stop the lessons if you insist, but I won't have his practise interrupted.

MOTHER (*authoritatively*). That's for me to say, Charlie. If I choose to lock the piano . . .

FATHER. The piano is mine.

MOTHER (*indignantly*). I ought to know it's yours. I gave it to you!

FATHER. And now you want to take it back?

MOTHER (*hurt*). My dear man, what a thing to say! Have I ever been that kind of wife?

FATHER. No, you haven't, and I hope you won't begin now.

MOTHER (*laughing resignedly*). Oh, well, have it your own way. You always do. But no more lessons for

RIGHT ABOUT FACE

at least six months! On that I *will* be firm. (*Chuckling.*) I'll save some money out of this, anyway.

FATHER (*gravely*). It seems a pity. Professor Salvatore says he has great talent.

MOTHER. Oh, I know, I know. But what good will talent do him when he's married to Alice? She can't tell one note from another.

FATHER. He won't marry Alice.

MOTHER. If not Alice, someone else. Plenty of young women after him. And he's a good boy . . . he'll settle down.

FATHER. I wish . . .

[*Checks himself.*]

MOTHER. Yes?

FATHER (*gathering courage*). I wish you'd let him take up this scholarship.

MOTHER. Charlie, I'm amazed at you! Let a young boy like that go off alone to the city? What kind of father are you, anyway?

FATHER. Just the same, I wish . . .

MOTHER (*firmly*). Once and for all, put that idea out of your head. Georgie will stay where every well-behaved boy *should* stay until he marries . . . right in his own home. It's where he belongs and (*Complacently.*) I may be old-fashioned, but I like my family around me.

FATHER (*stubbornly*). You're sending Nancy away.

MOTHER (*beginning to be seriously annoyed*). That's an entirely different matter. Good Lord, Charlie, are *you* getting bitten by these modern ideas? George's behavior is bad enough, but if *you* fail to back up my authority with him I shall have to be really severe. (*Father makes no reply in words. He sinks back in the armchair and closes his eyes as though completely exhausted. Surveying him anxiously.*) Now, Charlie, dear, I didn't mean to be harsh. (*Putting an arm around his shoulders.*) You know that, don't you?

RIGHT ABOUT FACE

FATHER (*still with closed eyes*). Yes, I know, Elizabeth. It's just . . . it's just . . . well, I don't suppose I *have* been very well, lately. Everything seems to upset me so.

MOTHER (*tenderly*). Well, then, we'll just have to make things smoother for you, that's all there is to it. (*In a brighter tone, opening her handbag.*) I tell you what, dear! You just go out and have a little spending spree. Here's fifty dollars . . . that ought to buy a lot of new shirts and socks and ties. Get some nice bright things to cheer you up.

FATHER (*opening his eyes*). Why, Elizabeth darling, that's altogether too much. Ah, well . . . (*Taking the money, as she urges it on him.*) maybe you're right.

[*He stands up, pulls her to him and kisses her affectionately, Mother responding. As they stand together Harry, the man-of-all-work, a tall gawky fellow in a large white apron, appears in the door.*]

HARRY. Dinner's on, Mr. Holden. (*Then, perceiving their embrace, he gives a loud embarrassed laugh.*) Haw, haw! I didn't mean to disturb you.

[*Mother and Father break away, somewhat embarrassed themselves, but laughing.*]

MOTHER (*good-naturedly*). That's all right, Harry. Hope you've got something extra nice for me.

HARRY. Strawberry shortcake, ma'am. The mister whipped it up special.

MOTHER. Well, now, that's fine.

[*Harry retires.*]

FATHER (*laughing*). That man! I know I ought to train him better, but I'm so afraid of losing him. Rough as he is, he does more than a dozen housemen in white coats.

MOTHER. Yes, Harry's a good faithful soul. Well, I'll just go along and wash my hands.

FATHER (*laughingly*). I might have known! No meal is ever announced in this family that all the women don't

RIGHT ABOUT FACE

go somewhere else immediately. All right, dear, but hurry up. (*Mother goes out. Father straightens a sofa cushion and looks up just in time to see George trying to slip through the room unseen. George is wearing his hat and carries a suitcase. Softly and conversationally.*) George, where are you going?

GEORGE (*in a fierce undertone*). Don't try to stop me!

FATHER. I'm not trying to stop you, son, not if you're going where I think you are.

GEORGE (*somewhat baffled by lack of opposition, but still defiant*). I'm going to the city.

FATHER. Good! That's what I hoped.

GEORGE (*incredulous*). But I thought you wanted me to marry Alice.

FATHER. No, I don't want that.

GEORGE (*with dawning hope*). Honestly? You don't?

FATHER. No, George. Granny was right about one thing. Music and matrimony don't mix, not for a man. You'll have to choose between them.

GEORGE. I know that . . . but . . . well, I expected a good, domestic man like you to tell me to choose marriage and children the way you did.

FATHER (*suddenly exploding*). The way I did! Look at my hands! When I was your age they were as supple and clever as yours. Now, almost everyone has forgotten that once I played as well as you. As your grandmother said, I've let my practising go. What else could I do? Easy enough to say now, that I have Harry to do the dishwashing and cleaning; but I spent years of dishwashing and cleaning before we could afford a man, and breaking a finger at baseball didn't exactly help! I didn't want to play the silly game, but your mother was so pleased and flattered when I was invited to join the Club that I didn't have the heart to refuse. And some of the men were husbands of her business associates . . . you have to think of those contacts when you're married . . . and a lot of other things.

RIGHT ABOUT FACE

GEORGE (*rather ill at ease*). I — I didn't know you felt that way, Father. You — you always seemed so happy. I'm sorry.

FATHER. No, it's all right, son. Probably I'd do it all over again. You see, I happen to love your mother enough so that she — and you children — have been worth it. Possibly you'll feel the same yourself, some day. But if you do marry, go into it with your eyes open. In the meantime, I want you to have your chance, the chance I never had.

GEORGE (*jubilantly*). Gee, Pop, it's grand to know you're on my side. I hate to do this, but . . .

FATHER. It's the only way. I tried to talk to your mother, but . . . well, you can go just so far with women by talking. After that, there's nothing to do but act.

GEORGE (*with determination, picking up his suitcase*). And that's what I'm doing.

FATHER. Wait a minute, son. Where are you planning to stay in the city?

GEORGE. Now don't begin to worry, Father! I'll be as safe as a church. Professor Salvatori has an old bachelor brother who keeps a boarding house. I'll stay with him.

FATHER (*relieved*). That's all right, then. How about money?

GEORGE. I'm sure Mr. Salvatori will trust me until the prize money is paid . . . and I've saved ten dollars from my suit allowance.

FATHER. That's not enough. (*He reaches into his pocket.*) Here's fifty dollars. I may be able to send you more later. Take good care of it and spend it carefully.

GEORGE (*his eyes popping*). Gosh, Pop, where did you get it?

FATHER (*humorous, but a little ashamed*). It's not where I got it, but how I got it that's bothering me. I — I

RIGHT ABOUT FACE

sort of worked your mother for it. She thinks I'm going to spend it on new ties and socks.

GEORGE (*troubled*). But, Father, I hate to have you do things like that . . . it seems sort of sneaky, somehow.

FATHER (*sadly*). I suppose it is . . . but if men are reduced to such measures they're bound to use them when it's necessary. Some day (*Wistfully*.) the world may change so that both sexes will get a square deal. I don't know whether it's possible. If men got the upper hand they might be just as unreasonable as women. However, that's very far away, and not a thing that any true man really wants. Remember, my boy, you're going out to add to the sum of living and endeavor, not to try and grab it all. But if the day ever comes when men can give up all this cadging and wheedling, it'll be you and other young men like you who make it possible.

GEORGE (*impulsively*). No! It'll be men like you, Father, who stayed home and did their manly duty and yet gave us a chance, who'll make it possible! (*Holding out his hand*.) I'll make you proud of me yet!

FATHER (*clapping the hand*). I'm proud of you now, son. Now take care of yourself, and be wary about the friends you make. Don't play around with any woman you wouldn't want to introduce to your father. But I don't need to tell you that. I know you'll be a good, sensible boy.

GEORGE. I will, Father. Good-bye.

FATHER (*wringing George's hand*). Good-bye, son, and God bless you!

[*As George is about to leave, Harry enters furtively, carrying a shoe box wrapped extremely man-fashion in brown paper and tied with rough twine.*]

HARRY (*in a sepulchral whisper*). Here, Mr. George, I put up a lap lunch for you to eat on the train.

FATHER (*in alarmed surprise*). Good Lord, Harry, how did you know about this?

HARRY (*reassuringly*). Don't you worry, Mr. Holden!

RIGHT ABOUT FACE

I ain't worked in this family fifteen years without I know about everything that goes on into it. (*To George.*)

I sure wish you luck!

GEORGE. Why, thanks, Harry. And thanks for the lunch.

HARRY (*politely*). Don't mention it. I'm real glad you're steppin' off. You'd oughta went before now. (*Viciously.*) Them women! This'll learn 'em they can't rule the roost *all* the time.

FATHER (*obviously doing his duty as a gentleman*). That'll do, Harry! I think you've said enough.

HARRY. Humph! I'd like to say it to 'em! They don't scare me none! (*Nevertheless, he looks over his shoulder apprehensively and speaks hurriedly to George.*) Say, young fella, you'd better get goin'.

GEORGE. I guess I had. Good-bye, Harry. (*Shakes his hand.*) Good-bye again, Pop!

[*Shakes Father's hand, seizes the package and his bag and darts from the room, just before Mother re-enters.*]

MOTHER (*cheerfully, rubbing her freshly washed hands*). Well, well, here we all are! At least . . . where are the children? (*Charlotte and Nancy, the latter also freshly scrubbed, enter together. Brightly.*) Now, let's not keep poor Father waiting any longer. (*Glancing up the stairs.*) I suppose we may as well let George come down. No sense in being *too* severe.

FATHER (*obviously nervous, but determined to give George time to escape*). George? Why, the fact is, I . . . I sent George out . . . for something. He'll be back . . . later.

MOTHER (*a trifle annoyed*). Not a very good time for errands, Charlie. Are you planning to wait dinner for him?

FATHER. Oh, no, we won't wait. You go on in. I'll follow you in a minute. I've got to speak to Harry . . . about . . . ah . . . the dessert. (*Mother, Charlotte and Nancy exit toward the dining room, leaving Father*

RIGHT ABOUT FACE

and Harry together. In a quick undertone.) I'll tell her after dinner. He ought to be on the train by then.

HARRY. Sure! That's the stuff, Mr. Holden. And don't you go worryin'. There ain't no call to worry.

FATHER (*determinedly*). No, I won't worry . . . there's nothing to worry about! He has my talent and his mother's pluck. He'll make good. I tell you, Harry, this just goes to show . . . ah . . . this just proves . . . this . . . Well, it certainly proves something, but I'm damned if I know what!

Curtain

FUN AFTER SUPPER

By

BETTY SMITH

Copyright, 1940, by Samuel French.

-

CAST

FRANCIE McLAIN.

JOHNNY McLAIN

RUTHIE McLAIN.

MAMA.

PAPA.

THE TIME is a December evening in the present.

THE PLACE is Williamsburg, Brooklyn, New York.

-

FUN AFTER SUPPER

The McLain flat consists of four rooms: a combination living-kitchen-dining room whose windows look down into the yard, two small bedrooms with airshaft windows and a parlor, known as "the front room" whose windows face the street.

The kitchen has two high narrow windows which give on to a fire escape and reveal a view of clotheslines and poles. A round table with an oilcloth cover stands between the windows. Several chairs are drawn up to it. This is the right side of the room. Every inch of the upstage wall is taken up by the following necessities which stand in a row. Starting from stage right is a pair of stone washtubs with a zinc cover. A cretonne curtain hangs from the edge to the floor concealing the space beneath the tubs which is used for the storage of coal, kindling, etc. There is an old-fashioned clock hanging over the tubs. A black iron sink comes next and then a kitchen stove. This is a large black coal range which is recessed in the wall. There is a slate hearthstone before it and a mantel over it. A plaster statue of the Virgin Mary stands on the mantelpiece along with a glass vase of pink paper roses and a glass chipped dish filled with bills, cards, receipts and stubs of pencils. Then there is a closet with a plain wooden door. Next to the closet and going kitty-cornered into the left wall, is the door which leads to the hallway. It has frosted glass panels and a patented chain lock. In left wall is a door leading into the other rooms. Downstage of the door, a window has been cut into the wall to provide light for the windowless bedroom. This has been but recently required by law and the window looks new. Downstage of this window, is a horsehair sofa with a rip in the upholstery and the springs sagging down beneath.

FUN AFTER SUPPER

The curtain rises on an empty stage. It is dark, but some light filters in through the frosted glass of the door. The lights are on in the hall. Shadows appear on the opaque glass. A key is inserted and after some fumbling, the door is opened and three children enter.

FRANCIE (*a pretty but poorly dressed girl of twelve with a tense worried look*). All in? (*The other two follow. Johnny is ten. He is a cheerful-looking boy. Ruthie is a sunny-haired child of six or seven.*) There we are.

[She closes the door and adjusts the chain lock.]

JOHNNY. You don't need to lock it. Mama will be here in a minute.

RUTHIE. Mama said, always lock the door. No matter what.

[Francie presses the wall switch. A naked bulb, hanging by a wire from the ceiling, reveals the details of the room.]

JOHNNY (*frowning at the clock*). It's only ten till. Mama will holler at us coming home from the library before six.

FRANCIE. Ruthie wouldn't sit still. The lady said we had to go because we made too much noise. (*To Ruthie.*) Why don't you learn to read?

JOHNNY (*contemptuously*). Always pictures!

RUTHIE. I'm in the first grade. Learn to read tomorrow. *[She starts to remove her wraps.]*

FRANCIE. Leave your coat on. There's no fire and it's cold in here.

RUTHIE (*joyously*). No fire? Watch me sit on the stove!

[She climbs up and sits on the stove.]

FRANCIE (*anxiously*). Do you think Mama will holler?

JOHNNY. Yup.

FRANCIE. Maybe the clock's slow. Maybe it is six o'clock.

FUN AFTER SUPPER

JOHNNY. We can say we thought it was time. I did, anyhow.

FRANCIE. That would be a lie. Mama wants us to sit in the library after school to keep warm because there's no fire here.

RUTHIE (*complacently*). And kidnappers might get us on the street.

FRANCIE. Now I could sit in the library all day till it closes. But not *her*.

JOHNNY. Not me, either. I like to play on the street. (*He climbs up on the tubs.*) Say! I'm going to make it six o'clock.

[*He opens the clock door.*]

FRANCIE. Mama will get mad.

JOHNNY. Mama won't know.

RUTHIE. Oh, yes, she will!

JOHNNY. Who's going to tell her?

RUTHIE (*suddenly*). God!

JOHNNY (*scared but defiant*). How is God going to know?

RUTHIE. He can see.

JOHNNY. Here? In this house?

RUTHIE. Yup! Right through the window.

JOHNNY. Who said!

RUTHIE. Sister Veronica said! In Sunday school.

JOHNNY (*pulls the shade clear down to the sill*). There! Now God can't see.

[*He turns the hands to six and the clock strikes.*]

RUTHIE (*awesomely*). You'll get it! Fooling God that way.

FRANCIE. Now stop that kind of talk.

JOHNNY. Anyway, I made it six o'clock.

[*There is a tap on the hall door. Johnny jumps off the tubs.*]

FRANCIE. Who's there?

MAMA. Me! Mama!

RUTHIE (*as Francie is about to release the chain*). Maybe it's a kidnapper.

FUN AFTER SUPPER

JOHNNY (*importantly takes charge. He stops Francie from opening the door and calls out*). How do we know it's you?

[*All three children are now at the door, excited at the hint of danger even if it is make-believe.*]

MAMA (*patiently*). It's me, Mama. You're very good children to be so careful. Now let me in.

RUTHIE. That don't sound like Mama.

JOHNNY (*shrewdly*). If you're Mama, what was Papa's Mama's name?

MAMA (*promptly*). Lottie Hummel.

JOHNNY. It's Mama all right.

[*They grin at each other.*]

RUTHIE. Sure nuff! It's Mama!

[*Francie opens the door and Mama comes in. She is pretty and just past 30. She wears plain dark clothes and has a white, courageous face. She carries a filled paper sack in one arm and a half-filled sack of charcoal in the other. Ruthie throws her arms about her knees and they walk to the table. The other children follow. Mama puts the bundles on the table and Ruthie grabs her hands.*]

MAMA. Why, your little hands are cold! Have you children been sitting in this cold place long?

FRANCIE. No, Mama.

MAMA. That's good. Walking home in the cold, I was thinking of you in the nice warm library with all the nice books . . . reading.

FRANCIE. Ruthie's a pest. She can't read and I have to tell her what all the pictures say and when I talk loud, the library lady says we have to go home.

RUTHIE. I can so read! I know A.

JOHNNY. The lady said ain't we got no home? She don't like us to sit there every day from three to six. Today she said we should go find a book and go home.

MAMA. The next time, Francie, you tell her you got a right to sit there and read.

FUN AFTER SUPPER

FRANCIE (*uneasily*). I don't like to say things like that, Mama. It makes me ashamed in front of the other children.

MAMA (*sighs*). All right, then. (*Sternly.*) Ruthie, you must sit still in the library.

RUTHIE. I can't. It hurts me when I sit so long. The chair bites my hind.

MAMA (*smiles fleetingly as she lifts the lids from the stove and crams in paper and charcoal*). Well, maybe Papa's found work today and I guess maybe I can stay home with you children now. (*She applies a match. The leaping flame reveals the sombre expression on her face.*) Besides . . . (*She waits a long time.*) How would you like a little baby sister . . . or a brother?

THE CHILDREN (*together*). No!

FRANCIE (*reproachfully*). Oh, Mama!

MAMA (*smiling at their earnestness*). Why not? A cunning baby . . .

RUTHIE. Because! Now when we get a penny, we buy three-for-a-cent suckers. If we have a sister, we have to buy the . . . the . . . one more for a cent kind. And they're *so* beansy-weansy.

MAMA (*putting the lids back in place*). But if God sends us a baby, we have to take it.

JOHNNY. Why? Couldn't you fool God?

RUTHIE. Johnny always fools God. Every day!

MAMA (*stares sombrely at her son. Acts as if about to say something. Instead she sighs*). Soon it will be warm in here and you can take off your coats.

FRANCIE. What's for supper? Did the lady pay you the dollar for cleaning?

MAMA. Yes. Would you like oatmeal again for supper?

THE CHILDREN (*together*). No!

MAMA. With condensed milk on?

JOHNNY. Oh, boy! Let my condensed milk stay on top. Don't mix it.

FUN AFTER SUPPER

RUTHIE. I want condens' milk on a piece of bread. And thick!

MAMA. Heat over the oatmeal from this morning, Francie.

[Francie places a covered saucepan over the hot part of the stove. Mama takes a can of milk and three bananas from the sack.]

RUTHIE *(catching sight of the bananas, speaks quickly)*. And I get a 'nana.

MAMA. There's one for each of you after you eat the oatmeal. *(She places the coffee pot over the fire.)*

Now I guess it's warm and we can take off our coats.

FRANCIE. You forgot to take the wash in.

MAMA. Oh, I should have thought of that before I started the fire. It will make the room cold . . . the window open.

RUTHIE. Please, Mama. We want to help.

MAMA. All right then. *(She pulls up the shade and opens the window. She stands straight and struggles with the frozen clothes line. She looks vivid and gallant. After a struggle, some of it real and some put on for the delight of the children, she pulls in a suit of men's underwear, frozen stiff.)* Ready, my men?

THE CHILDREN *(who have lined up)*. Aye, aye, sir! *(She hands the suit to Ruthie who importantly passes it to Francie who passes it to Johnny who places it on the horsehair sofa. Four or five garments are handled in this way. The children enjoy it. Mama closes the window.)* The rest must wait. The house is getting cold. Put the plates out, Francie.

[Francie gets plates and spoons from the cupboard and arranges them on the table.]

RUTHIE *(dancing around with the suit of frozen underwear)*. Oh, how nice it smells! Like rich people smell when they come down to the settlement house. Such a nice smell.

MAMA. Now you can take off your coats. Hang them

FUN AFTER SUPPER

up. (*They do so, Francie helping Ruthie who is forced to abandon her effigy.*) Oatmeal's nearly hot. Soon we'll eat.

FRANCIE. Are we going to wait for Papa?

MAMA. No. It might be all hours till he gets home. He has to walk all the way from Bush Terminal. (*The children sit at the table and Mama pours oatmeal into their plates. She punches two holes in the top of the can with a can opener.*) There you are. (*Johnny reaches for the can.*) No, Johnny. (*She takes it and pours milk on the girls' oatmeal.*) The girls come first. That's manners.

JOHNNY. What's the use of having manners only for oatmeal?

RUTHIE. Manners is nice because Johnny gets left.

JOHNNY (*who now has the can, uses the milk liberally*). Who's getting left?

MAMA. Children! Children! Eat! Don't fight. Be glad you've got something to eat.

JOHNNY (*defiantly*). Other people's got stuff to eat. They ain't glad just on account of that. They got other things, too.

MAMA (*despairingly*). Oh, Johnny, Johnny! Be a good boy!

FRANCIE. You eat, Mama.

MAMA. I'll eat after. I'm not hungry, now.

RUTHIE. Oh, it's so good! It makes my stomach hot on the inside. And the fire makes it hot on the outside. Oh, how good!

JOHNNY. Mama, if you don't eat, play the piano. So it's like a restaurant while *we* eat.

MAMA. It's cold in the front room.

THE CHILDREN. Light the oil stove!

MAMA. All right. (*Takes a portable oil heater from the cupboard and kneels to light it.*) Only I don't play good. I don't know why you children want to hear me all the time.

FUN AFTER SUPPER

FRANCIE. You play grand, Mama. Teach me some day.
MAMA (*with a strange shyness*). I'd like to learn too, someday.

JOHNNY. When will the people get their piano?

MAMA. Never, maybe. When they moved out, they couldn't even pay the ten dollars to have it moved.

They're glad we're keeping it. Only it isn't much good.

RUTHIE. I hid behind it once when we played hide-'n'-go-seek.

MAMA (*stands in doorway holding the lighted oilstove by the handle*). Maybe the keys are too cold. But what do you want me to play?

[*The children call out together.*]

FRANCIE. "Sweet Entreaties."

JOHNNY. "Welcome, Sweet Springtime."

RUTHIE (*shrilly*). "Come, Little Leaves."

MAMA. Ruthie's first.

[*She goes out with the oilstove.*]

FRANCIE. I'm going to slice my banana on my oatmeal.

RUTHIE. I want mine that way, too.

[*Francie starts to slice Ruthie's banana over her oatmeal.*]

JOHNNY. I'm going to eat mine slow and whole and peel it a little at a time so it lasts longer.

FRANCIE (*has finished slicing*). There, Ruthie.

RUTHIE (*starts to cry*). I don't want it that way. I want to eat it like Johnny.

FRANCIE (*exasperated*). But you said!

RUTHIE (*weeping*). But I didn't mean it.

FRANCIE. All right, I'll change with you then. Here's mine.

[*She exchanges plates and gives Ruthie her own whole banana.*]

JOHNNY. I wouldn't do it. I'd make her eat it the way she said.

FRANCIE. Aw, she's little yet. She don't know.

[*Now from the front room comes the sound of the*

FUN AFTER SUPPER

piano. Mama is picking out the melody part with one finger and accompanying it with a faked bass. The music is very soft because there is a room or two between and Mama is using the soft pedal on account of the people downstairs. She plays a little introduction to Ruthie's song and then strikes a chord.

RUTHIE (*starts singing in an uncertain, tremulous child's voice*). "Come, little leaves, said the wind one day.

Come o'er the meadows with me and play.

Put on your dresses of red and gold,

For . . ." (*While she stops to recall the next word, the music gets ahead of her and she hurries up the last line.*)

"Summer is gone and the days grow cold."

JOHNNY. That ain't the right words.

FRANCIE. Do you know the second part?

JOHNNY (*starts singing the second verse and the girls join in. All are uncertain of the words and improvise their own*).

"Soon as the leaves heard the wind's loud call,

Down they came fluttering, one and all.

Over the meadows they danced and . . ." (*The girls stop waiting for Johnny to supply the next word which eludes them.*) "Danced and . . . la . . ."

ALL (*coming in strong on the last line*). "Singing, summer's gone and . . ." (*Each waits for the other to supply the next word. Finally all come out strongly to catch up with the last bars of the music.*) "The la . . . la . . . laah!"

JOHNNY (*as Mama plays very softly*). When I get big, I'm going to have music all the time when I eat and no oatmeal, either.

FRANCIE. I saw a picture. People eat on trains while they are going. With white tablecloths.

RUTHIE. If I ate on a train, I'd eat first before I went so I wouldn't have to eat on the train.

JOHNNY. You don't know what you're talking about. (*Strains of Rubinstein's "Melody in F," Johnny's choice,*

FUN AFTER SUPPER

come from the front room. He sings a line.) "Welcome, sweet springtime, we greet thee in song." That's the song I like.

RUTHIE. Christmas is coming soon.

FRANCIE. Johnny, if you're done, put your plate and spoon in the sink. (*He does so.*) You too, Ruthie. You're big enough.

[*Song is being played softly all this while.*]

RUTHIE. I have to eat my 'nana, first.

JOHNNY. *Banana*, you dope.

FRANCIE. Let her say what she wants.

JOHNNY. If she won't say it right, I won't let her smell Christmas coming.

RUTHIE (*quickly*). *Banana!* Now let me smell Christmas coming.

FRANCIE. You smelled Christmas last night. You can't smell it every night.

JOHNNY. Let her just once. (*He is very proud of his game.*) Now you wait till I tell you. (*He opens the window carefully; an infinitesimal crack.*) There! Put your nose to it and take a deep smell.

RUTHIE (*does so and is in ecstasy*). I smell it! I smell it! It's coming soon!

JOHNNY. What does it smell like?

RUTHIE. Tangerine peels.

JOHNNY (*smells*). I smell Christmas snow on the way.

RUTHIE (*lifting her eyes ceilingward and calling for snow*). Feather boy? Just shake down some feathers from the sky.

JOHNNY. Now you, Francie.

FRANCIE (*smelling*). Christmas trees! I can smell them.

JOHNNY (*shutting the window*). There! You smelled Christmas coming.

RUTHIE. I'm going to ask Sanny Claus for a big doll.

JOHNNY. There ain't no Sanny Claus. You're too big.

RUTHIE. There is so! I saw one outside the ten-cent store last Christmas.

FUN AFTER SUPPER

JOHNNY. You saw three on the same block, too.

RUTHIE. He's magic. He's all over at once. I believe in the Easter bunny, too.

JOHNNY. Did he ever bring you anything?

RUTHIE. Not yet. But last Easter, I smelled out the window and it smelled like an Easter egg. That must have been the bunny.

JOHNNY. You mean you smelled like an Easter egg. *(This remark strikes the children as very funny and they all laugh. Now Mama is playing a simple gay waltz. The children are familiar with it. Johnny clenches his fists against his waist line, puffs out his cheeks, sticks out his chest and does some stiff-legged waltz steps. He chants his own improvisation to the music.)* "Come in the backhouse and dance with me,
Dance with me. . . ."

RUTHIE. You're saying a bad word. That's a bad word. I'm going to tell Mama.

JOHNNY (*whirling around*). "Dance with me, dance with me."

FRANCIE. Now you better stop it, Johnny.

JOHNNY (*swinging into the next phrase*). "So come to the backhouse and dance with me,
Dance with me."

[*Ruthie shrieks with laughter.*]

FRANCIE. Stop it! Stop it!

[*But she, too, breaks out into laughter.*]

JOHNNY (*enjoying the sensation he is causing*). "Backhouse me. Dance with me. Dance with me."

[*The music stops. Johnny stops all out of breath. All three are laughing.*]

FRANCIE. If Mama ever catches you . . .

RUTHIE (*giggling*). Remember the time you got too close to the stove, Johnny, and your waist caught on fire?

FRANCIE. And you burned a big hole in it.

JOHNNY. And when the fire got out, we threw it down the airshaft.

FUN AFTER SUPPER

FRANCIE. Sh-h-h! Mama's still looking for that blouse.

RUTHIE. She did so find it and she sewed up the hole and she put it back in the drawer. So she knows.

[*All are silent, remembering that time and thinking about Mama knowing and not scolding them. The first bars of Schubert's "Serenade" come from the front room.*]

FRANCIE (*singing*). "Warm entreaties, gently stealing,
Through the night to thee. . . ."

JOHNNY (*burlesquing her*). "Through the ni-i-i-i-ight
to theeeeee!"

FRANCIE. That's my song.

JOHNNY. We got that in school now.

RUTHIE. We sing, "Three Blind Mice." (*She shivers.*)
It's getting cold.

JOHNNY. The fire's going out. There's no more charcoal.

FRANCIE. Soon we'll go in bed. We'll be warm.

JOHNNY. Papa's not home yet. It's too early to go in bed.

FRANCIE. Ruthie, if you're cold, sit by the stove, then.

RUTHIE (*crouches on the floor before the stove*). Mama will bring the oil stove out soon.

FRANCIE. Mama has to save the oil stove so she can play the piano nights.

JOHNNY. I sit in the school all day. I sit in the library after school. I don't want to go to bed. I want to go down on the street and play with the boys. Not always with girls. I don't want to be a sissy.

FRANCIE. Mama won't let you play on the street. The boys are too bad.

JOHNNY. Well, I'm going to sit on the stove then. Just for fun.

FRANCIE. You'll burn up.

JOHNNY (*teasingly*). I hope so. (*He sits on the end of the stove which is removed from the firepot and not very warm. Ruthie starts to whimper in fright, believing he*

FUN AFTER SUPPER

will be burned.) Oh, keep still. It ain't hot. You can sit here if you want to.

RUTHIE. No. I'm going to play tic-tac-toe.

[She takes a small bit of chalk from her dress pocket and marks the lines on the hearthstone.]

JOHNNY. If you stole that chalk from school, a policeman will come after you.

RUTHIE (*whimpering*). I did not steal it. It was laying on the floor and I picked it up.

FRANCIE. Let her alone, Johnny.

RUTHIE. Nobody plays with me.

JOHNNY. You play dumb games.

RUTHIE (*undaunted*). Let's play what do you want for Christmas.

JOHNNY. No.

RUTHIE. Let's play the clock strikes twelve.

FRANCIE. That's a baby game. Let's play, What Are You Going To Be?

RUTHIE. I don't want to play What Are You.

FRANCIE. Play and I'll let you be first.

JOHNNY. I don't want her to be first.

FRANCIE. Let her. She don't take long. Go ahead. You're first, Ruthie.

RUTHIE (*pursing up her lips*). When I get big, I want to be a mama.

JOHNNY (*with a snort of derisive laughter*). That's not a good Want-To-Be. Anybody can be a mama.

RUTHIE (*thinking*). Well, I want to be a candy store lady then and eat up all the candy.

JOHNNY. I want to be . . .

RUTHIE. Wait! Wait! I didn't make the motions for my Want-To-Be.

JOHNNY. Too late. You had your chance. Go ahead, Francie.

FRANCIE. I want to be a nurse and wear a clean dress every day and white shoes. I'll go right up to a sick

FUN AFTER SUPPER

lady and say, (*Bending over an imaginary bed.*) My, my. You're a very sick party today. Too much soda water yesterday. But what a cunning baby you have. Now I will take your temperature.

JOHNNY. My turn now. I'm going to be a lawyer. (*He scrambles off the stove and addresses his sisters as though they were the jury. Although they have played this many times, the girls watch his performance, wide-eyed.*) Gentlemen of the jury and the judge. This man did not commit this foul murder. They only say he did. He was home sleeping in bed when this man got his head bashed in. And how did he get it bashed in? I will tell you. He fell off of the elevator station at Graham Avenue and this kind man picked him up and now they say he murdered him. I call the first witness, Miss Francie McLain.

FRANCIE. I knew the murdered party. I was his nurse when his wife had a baby. He did not do it.

JOHNNY. Of course not, Francie. Someone did it to him. Why don't you play right or not at all?

FRANCIE. I forgot.

JOHNNY. Next witness. Ruthie McLain.

RUTHIE. He came in my store for a nickel's worth of candy and his head was bleeding. I saw it.

JOHNNY. I'm the judge now. (*Pounds on the table with a spoon.*) Order! Order in the courtroom. Order!

[*Pounds again with the spoon. But when he stops, the pounding continues. The children are startled for a moment. Then they discover the pounding is at the door.*]

FRANCIE. Who's there?

PAPA (*off*). Open that door!

RUTHIE (*beginning to cry*). Don't open it. It's a kidnapper for sure, now.

PAPA (*banging*). Open that door before I break it down.

FRANCIE (*running into the front room*). Mama! Mama!

[*Banging continues.*]

FUN AFTER SUPPER

MAMA (*comes running. She looks terrified. Francie follows. Mama unlocks the door*). Just a minute, John.

[*The door opens and their father comes in. He is tired and dazed. He is thirty. Once he was handsome and eagerly young. Now there is an uncertain quality about him. He wears no overcoat and seems cold. He goes to the table without looking at the children.*]

JOHNNY. What's the matter, Papa?

MAMA. Sh! Don't bother your father. (*To Papa.*) There's coffee still left from this morning, John. It's hot and we've got milk tonight. I was waiting until you got home so I could have some with you.

[*She pours out the coffee.*]

FRANCIE. We ate already.

MAMA. Hush! (*She pours milk into the cups and sits down opposite him.*) Drink, John. It's good and hot. (*He stares at the cup. Suddenly, he pushes it from him and it clatters to the floor. He buries his face in his arms on the table. The children look at each other fearfully. Ruthie begins to whimper. Francie puts her arm around her and the three children stand near the bedroom door ready to run.*) What is it, John? Tell me. (*He does not answer. All wait. Finally Mama sighs.*) Then it was no good walking over there? They're not taking on any men? They don't need a new lathe hand like Mr. Benson said?

PAPA. They needed one all right. And four hundred were there ahead of me. Took me all day to walk there and back. Benson just gave me a bum steer again.

MAMA (*sighs*). Today, Mrs. Benson said she didn't need me anymore. She's going to do her own work. That means we won't have that dollar a day even.

PAPA. I'll find something. I'm a good hand. There must be work.

MAMA. For three years you've been looking . . .

PAPA (*too ready to give up*). You're right. There's nothing. There never will be nothing. I give up.

FUN AFTER SUPPER

MAMA. No, John! You can't! In less than three months' . . .

PAPA (*passionately*). Is it my fault? Did I want another child? Did I ask for it?

MAMA (*warningly*). John! The children!

PAPA. Let them hear! Let them know! That's all poor people are entitled to. Children! Children and more children! (*Turning to the children.*) Remember that!

JOHNNY. When I get big . . .

PAPA. Shut up! Shut up, I say.

MAMA. Your father's upset. Don't say anything to him. Be still, all of you. (*To Papa.*) Now, John, don't talk that way to the children. There must be something . . .

PAPA. What? How much rent do we owe? Four months. When did we eat meat last? When was the last time we had a good warm fire? When did we . . .

MAMA. But we're both young . . . strong . . . healthy. You've got a good trade. I've got such nice children. We've got everything . . .

PAPA. Everything but work.

MAMA (*patiently*). There must be something. . . .

PAPA. Yes! There's relief.

MAMA. We don't want relief. We can work for our food. You've got a trade. . . .

PAPA. Sure! Sure! Go ahead and tell 'em that. Tell 'em. Tell the president I want a job, not charity. Tell the angels in heaven. Tell everybody we want work and see what happens. (*Getting to his feet.*) Well, our troubles are over. Tomorrow we go on relief.

MAMA. John! No! Please don't give up now.

PAPA. We're all set. We won't have any trouble. They can investigate their heads off and not even find a nickel a week insurance policy left. Listen, you children! Tonight you are something; entitled to all you can get for yourselves, entitled to whatever you can make of yourselves. Tonight, you own the future. Enjoy yourself well this last night because tomorrow we give up.

FUN AFTER SUPPER

MAMA. Papa's just talking.

PAPA. Tomorrow we go on relief. In the months to come, we will sit here, your mother and me. I will sit at that window and your mother will sit at the other one. We will sit all day and look down in the yard. Someone will bring us our food. Someone will pay the rent. Someone will dole out coal to us. And we get used to it. Do you hear? *We get used to it.*

JOHNNY (*bravely*). Mama won't.

PAPA. Oh, yes, she will. We'll sit here and forget how to work and forget how to teach you to be hard-working and ambitious; how to earn the bread you eat. That starts tomorrow. Tonight, we have nothing but hope. Tomorrow, we have just nothing. (*The children huddle together looking at each other in fear. Ruthie is confused.*) So play, children. Play happily this one night. (*The children stare silently at their father.*) Play! Play! While you still have a few hours left.

RUTHIE (*in innocent delight*). Papa said we should play. We'll play the clock strikes. (*She places both hands over her head in a diving position.*) I'm twelve o'clock now.

[*The father sits on the couch, lowers his head in his hands and sobs throughout the children's game.*]

MAMA (*sits next to him and holds his head to her breast*).

Play with Ruthie. Play for mama. Your papa will be all right soon.

[*Obediently, the children stand on either side of Ruthie. They assume the stiff poses of Dresden shepherd and shepherdess and turn and bow jerkily in time to the imaginary clock striking.*]

RUTHIE (*in solemn delight*). Bong . . . Bong . . . Bong . . . Bong . . . (*At the twelfth stroke, they come upright and stand rigidly.*) Bong! Twelve o'clock, Papa. It's another day.

[*She claps her hands and the children fall out of the pose.*]

MAMA (*as the father gets to his feet and goes into the bed-*

FUN AFTER SUPPER

room with his hands pressed over his eyes and his shoulders shaking). That was very nice. Papa doesn't feel well. I'm going to put the oilstove in his bedroom for a while. *(The children stare at her strangely and her voice breaks.)* Don't look at me so funny. Everything's all right. Nothing's the matter. Papa's just a little tired, that's all. Play a little longer, children, while there's still some heat in the room.

JOHNNY. Is this the last time we get to play because we're going . . . going . . . what Papa said?

MAMA. Relief? Yes, we're going on relief. We'll have something to eat at last.

FRANCIE. The other kids will holler after us on the street . . . that we're poor.

MAMA. We're poor through no fault of our own. We want to work; we tried to work. But there is little work left in the world today. So we'll take relief and we'll live! You children will grow up strong. And we won't forget about ambition and how to work well. We will keep on trying. I will tell you all that I know. We will think about all these things. And maybe, when Johnny gets big, he will figure out some way to make the world an easier place to live in for those who work . . . so there won't be times like this again. So play, children. Some nice game. I'll be right back.

[She goes into the bedroom. The two older children stare after her thoughtfully.]

RUTHIE *(innocently and joyously)*. Mama said we should play. Come on. What game? *(Silence.)* Mama said. *(Silence.)* I'll tell Mama on you if you won't play with me. *(Wheedlingly.)* Let's play Christmas Coming again. *(Silence.)* I know! You want to play What-Are-You-Going-To-Be again.

FRANCIE. No.

RUTHIE. If you play with me, I'll let Johnny be first. *(She waits and then asks brightly.)* Johnny, what are you going to be when you get big?

FUN AFTER SUPPER

JOHNNY. I'm going to be a man, of course.

RUTHIE (*getting back at him*). That's not a good one.
Anybody can be a *man*.

JOHNNY (*seriously and a little shyly*). I mean, I'm going
to be a man . . . like *Mama*.

[*The girls burst into shrieks of laughter. Johnny joins
in as . . .*]

The Curtain Falls.

-

PLAY BALL!

By

SPRANGER BARRY

Copyright, 1940, by Samuel French.

CAST

BUCK NICHOLS, *manager of the Blue Sox*, 45.

MRS. MCGUFF, *handywoman and team "mother,"* 60.

JANE MARSHALL, 21.

BILL PALMER, 23.

G. D. PALMER, *his father*, 45.

SCENE. The office of the State City Blue Sox, in the Blue Sox Stadium.

TIME. A morning in June.

PLAY BALL!

The office of the State City Blue Sox, in the Blue Sox Stadium. At right is the manager's desk; at back is a bench. There are chairs for visitors, and a costumer. On the wall back center is a banner reading "Blue Sox Baseball Club." There are framed pictures of ball players around the room, silver cups, plaques, etc. Doors up right and up left.

As the curtain rises, Mrs. McGuff, an elderly woman but quite spry, is cleaning with a feather-duster and arranging things. She hums as she works: "Take Me Out to the Ball Game." Buck Nichols, manager of the Blue Sox, a big, solid man, comes in left and hangs up his hat.

BUCK. G' morning, Mrs. McGuff.

MRS. MCGUFF. Ah, good mornin', Mr. Nichols. How's the best manager in the Federal League this mornin'?

BUCK. If you mean me, I don't feel so good.

MRS. MCGUFF. Ah, that's too bad. Is it because the team lost yesterday?

BUCK. Not only that. Because they lost yesterday and the day before and three times last week.

MRS. MCGUFF. Well, it's a hard season.

BUCK. No harder than it ever is. The Blue Sox used to be champions of this league. Now we're struggling to keep in fourth place.

MRS. MCGUFF. All the pep seems to have gone out of the boys since Mr. Marshall died.

BUCK. Yes, but that was over a month ago. They should be picking up by now. I used to be a pretty good manager when old Pete Marshall was alive — bless him! — and I still ought to be able to do a good job under the new owner, but . . .

PLAY BALL!

MRS. MCGUFF. The new owner! Who is that?

BUCK. I don't know yet. The lawyers are reading old Pete's will to his family this morning. Jane's coming over to tell me about it soon as it's over.

MRS. MCGUFF. Miss Jane's just like her poor dear father, isn't she? A one hundred per cent dyed-in-the-wool baseball fan.

BUCK. Yup. Her dad's death sure hit her hard.

MRS. MCGUFF. I don't wonder. Do you remember, Mr. Nichols, how her father used to bring her to the games when she was a little girl?

BUCK. I sure do. And when she was only eight years old, the boys elected her mascot.

MRS. MCGUFF (*nods*). Aye, if anyone's interested in the future of the Blue Sox, it's Jane Marshall.

BUCK. Well, they won't have much future if things don't pick up. You've been around here a long time, Mrs. McGuff; every player on the Blue Sox has called you "mom." So I don't mind letting you know that unless the new owner allows me to shake things up around here and . . .

MRS. MCGUFF. Do you have any idea who the new owner will be?

BUCK. No, but there are lots of possibilities. Anyway, Jane will be along soon to tell me. . . . (*A knock at the door left.*) Come in.

[*Jane Marshall comes in left. She is a pretty, active girl of twenty-one.*]

JANE. Good morning, Buck.

BUCK. Hello, Jane.

JANE. Hello, Mrs. McGuff.

MRS. MCGUFF. Hello, Miss Jane, dearie. How are you?

JANE. Oh, I'm feeling much better, thanks. And you?

MRS. MCGUFF. Spry as a rookie outfielder the first day's training. I've got to get along and make sure there's clean towels in the locker-room. I'll see you by and by.

JANE. All right, Mrs. McGuff.

PLAY BALL!

BUCK. So long, mom. (*Mrs. McGuff goes out right.*)
Well, Janie?

JANE. Well, Buck, I've heard the news. The lawyers just read Dad's will and now I know who the new owner is.

BUCK (*nods*). I suppose he appointed three or four people to . . .

JANE. Nope.

BUCK. No?

JANE. He left the club — entirely and unconditionally — to me.

BUCK. What!

JANE. Yup. You're talking to the new owner.

BUCK. Well! Well, I'll be . . .

JANE (*quickly*). You'll be manager, that's what you'll be.

BUCK. Well, thanks, Jane — but — but this sure is some surprise. Oh, I knew he'd leave you a share in the club, but I didn't think . . .

JANE. I'm the sole owner. The Blue Sox belong to me.

BUCK. Gee! Well, I think that's swell.

JANE. I'll bet I'm the only girl in the country who owns an up-and-going professional baseball team.

BUCK (*sighs*). I wish that were true.

JANE. You mean you know another girl . . .

BUCK. No. I mean I wish they were up and going. We're in fourth place now, Jane, and we're not too sure of holding on to that.

JANE. But why, Buck? We were league champions last year, and we've got the same manager and practically the same team.

BUCK. Yeah, except for pitchers. It was some sock on the jaw when Lefty Burke had to retire, but he was just getting too old.

JANE. And we have no one to replace him?

BUCK. Not yet. It wasn't only the games that Lefty won, it was the feeling of confidence he gave the team. That's what we need.

PLAY BALL!

JANE. And isn't there a possibility of getting someone to . . .

BUCK. Yes, just one. We've had scouts out for some time, combing the woods for prospective pitchers, and they've discovered just one good bet — right in this town.

JANE. In State City?

BUCK. Yup, right here in this town. He's up at the University. He's been playing ball for his college team, and he's made some wonderful records. He graduates this month. . . .

JANE. Well, then, why don't you send for him and speak to him? Why . . .

BUCK (*laughs*). Whoa, there, hold your horses! That's exactly what I've done. I *have* sent for him. He's coming here this morning. In fact, he's due any minute now.

JANE. Oh, I hope he's the pitcher we need. The boys are so unhappy about — about losing dad, they need something new and fresh to put them on their feet again.

BUCK. Well, they'll all be glad to hear you're the new owner. That'll put some pep in them. When are you going to tell them?

JANE. Right away. This morning, as soon as they show up for practice. What time are they supposed to report?

BUCK. They should be out there by now. (*Looking out window.*) Yes, there are a few of them already.

JANE. I think I'll go down and see them.

BUCK. O.K., break the good news. And tell Cap Wilson to put the boys through their paces. I'll be down as soon as I'm through here.

JANE. Right.

[*Mrs. McGuff pokes her head in left.*]

MRS. MCGUFF. There's a young feller to see you, Mr. Nichols.

BUCK. What's the name, mom?

PLAY BALL!

MRS. MCGUFF. Palmer. William Palmer.

BUCK. Show him in. (*Mrs. McGuff goes. To Jane.*)

He's the young feller from the University. I'd better see him alone. You go that way.

JANE. All right, Buck. Good luck.

[*She exits right.*]

BUCK. Thanks.

MRS. MCGUFF (*showing Bill in left*). There you are, sonny.

[*She withdraws.*]

BILL. Much obliged. (*He is a husky, pleasant young fellow of twenty-three.*) Mr. Nichols.

BUCK. That's right. (*Shaking hands.*) How are you, Palmer? Sit down, won't you?

BILL (*as they sit*). Thanks. Well, I got your letter asking me to call this morning. I haven't much idea of what it's about — but here I am.

BUCK. You haven't any idea?

BILL. Not much, but I sure hope it's important. This is exam week, and if I expect to graduate, I'll have to do some boning.

BUCK. Wait a minute now. You're the right Bill Palmer, aren't you? You pitched for your college team?

BILL. Pitched?

BUCK. Yeah, you remember — baseball.

BILL (*calmly*). Oh. Oh, yes, I played with the boys.

BUCK (*almost exploding*). You — you pl — you played with th . . . (*Controlling himself, he picks up a piece of paper from the desk.*) According to my figures, during your four years of college, you pitched sixty-two games of baseball. Out of those sixty-two games, you won fifty and lost twelve. You made nine hundred and eighty-five strikeouts, but only one hundred and nineteen bases on balls. You gave opposing teams an average of less than a third of a run an inning. And while doing all this, you managed to keep up an overall batting average of .297. (*Calmly.*) Remember?

PLAY BALL!

BILL (*nods*). Yeah. (*Pleasantly.*) It was a lot of fun.

BUCK (*choking*). A lot — a lot of fun . . . (*Restrainedly.*) Well, Palmer, since you haven't any idea of what you were called here for this morning, let me tell you. This month you're graduating from college. The Blue Sox need pitchers. You're a pitcher. We want you. See?

BILL. Oh. Well, I wouldn't mind playing a little with you this summer, but . . .

BUCK (*patiently*). Listen, maybe you don't quite get the idea. The Blue Sox are a professional team. The men who play with us do it for a living. We want you to sign a three-year contract with proportionate salary raises.

BILL. Three years? Salary? Oh, I'm afraid that's out of the question. You see, I'm going into my father's office in the fall.

BUCK. Father's office? What for?

BILL. Why, to learn the business. I'm going to take it over some day.

BUCK. Say, maybe you don't know it, Palmer, and I certainly hate to tell you, but you're crazy!

BILL. Am I? Well, well.

BUCK. Do you realize how rare a pitcher like you is? And do you think I'm going to let you get away — to go into some office — to . . .

BILL. But I'm afraid there's not much to be done about it. It's all settled. Perhaps you don't know who my father is.

BUCK. Perhaps I don't. Who is he?

BILL. G. D. Palmer.

BUCK. Oh, the big stockbroker.

BILL. That's right. G. D. Palmer, Stocks and Bonds.

BUCK. And do you mean you're going to waste that right arm of yours stretching ticker tape in a broker's office?

BILL. Exactly. Dad and I are quite set on it. Besides . . .

PLAY BALL!

BUCK. Besides — what?

BILL. Well, no offense, mind you, but even if I changed my plans, I wouldn't go into sports. Baseball was all right in college. It was good exercise and a lot of fun. But to go into it professionally, to do it for a living . . .

BUCK. What's the matter with that? Plenty of good men have done it.

BILL. No doubt. But not a Palmer, in State City. Dad would never get over it.

BUCK. Now, mister, do you want me to believe that you seriously intend not to go on pitching after you leave college?

BILL. That's the idea.

BUCK. But — but there might even be a *lot* of money in it for you.

BILL. Oh, brokerage is a pretty good business.

BUCK. Well, I'll be a ring-tailed chimpanzee! Thousands of young fellows all over the country who'd give their eye-teeth to play with a team like the Blue Sox, and the one guy we pick turns us down.

BILL. Professional athletics may be all very well for some people, but not for me. I couldn't think of going through life merely trading on a little knack.

BUCK. A *knack*! Sweet sufferin' Aunt Tillie! He wins fifty out of sixty-two games and he calls it a knack! I suppose Christy Matthewson just had a slight flair!

BILL. Never heard of the gentleman.

BUCK. I believe you. Well, is your mind made up?

BILL. Quite.

BUCK. Stocks and bonds?

BILL. Stocks and bonds.

BUCK (*shrugs*). O.K. But if I ever tell this to the boys, they'll never believe it. (*Rises and extends his hand.*) Well, Palmer, it was good of you to drop in.

BILL (*rising and taking the hand*). Not at all. It was good of you to invite me. Sorry I wasted your time.

BUCK. 'S all right, 's all right.

PLAY BALL!

BILL. By the way, have you a phone that I could use?
As long as I'm downtown, I think I'll phone dad, have him pick me up and take me to lunch.

BUCK. Sure. There's a phone in the next room.

BILL. Thanks.

[*He puts his hat down and goes out left.*]

BUCK (*to himself*). Fifty out of sixty-two! Bats .297!
(*Growls.*) Stocks and bonds!

[*Jane returns right.*]

JANE. Well, Buck, I told them! They know I'm the new owner.

BUCK. Oh — er — yeah? How'd they take it?

JANE. Didn't you hear them? They gave me three cheers.

BUCK. No, I — I didn't hear them. I — I've been busy.

JANE. Oh. Well, how's Mr. Palmer?

BUCK. He's all right. But *I'm* a nervous wreck.

JANE. Why — what's the matter?

BUCK. Jane, would you believe it? The one guy our scouts find whom we can really use . . . (*Picking it up and throwing it down.*) we have a contract made out ready for him to sign — and he doesn't want to go into professional baseball. He says it's beneath his family's dignity.

JANE. What!

BUCK. Yeah, and he says he doesn't want to trade on his little knack for pitching. So he's going to be a stock-broker.

JANE. And — and you're going to let him?

BUCK. What can I do? Hit him over the head?

JANE. You shouldn't have let him go. I'd liked to have had a talk with him.

BUCK. He hasn't gone. He's in the next room, phoning. He'll be back in a minute.

JANE. Then I *will* have a talk with him.

BUCK. O.K. with me. But I'm going downstairs to watch

PLAY BALL!

the boys work out. Believe me, I need a breath of fresh air.

[He goes right.]

JANE (*to herself*). Beneath his dignity, indeed! Won't go into professional baseball! Even if he doesn't sign with us, I'll give him a piece of my mind! The puffed-up thing!

[Bill returns, left.]

BILL (*surprised at seeing her*). Oh — er — excuse me.

JANE (*struck with his appearance*). H-hello!

BILL. I — I didn't know — that is, I just came back for my hat.

JANE. Oh. I guess that's it — over there.

BILL. Has Mr. Nichols gone? I wanted to say goodbye to him.

JANE. Yes, he's gone.

[Bill rather likes her looks, too, and is not at all anxious to go.]

BILL. Er — do you work here?

JANE. Sort of, yes.

BILL. Mr. Nichols' assistant?

JANE. Yes, in a way. Are you Mr. Palmer?

BILL. That's right, Bill Palmer. What's your name?

JANE. My name's — Jane.

BILL. Jane. Pretty name.

JANE. Thanks.

BILL. Er — I have to wait around here for my father. Do you mind if I wait in here?

JANE (*eagerly*). Not at all. (*More controlled.*) That is — no, I don't mind.

BILL. Thanks. You know, I had a funny experience this morning.

JANE. How's that?

BILL. Well, I'm at the University, you know, graduating this month. I've been playing ball with the college team ever since I've been there; had a lot of fun out of it,

PLAY BALL!

and I guess I wasn't too bad at it because at least they didn't throw me off the team. But gee, what do you think? This morning Mr. Nichols suggested that I make baseball my profession!

JANE. What's so terrible about that?

BILL. But it's only a *game*!

JANE. A darned good one. Besides, the stock market is only a bigger game.

BILL. Oh, you've heard that — that I . . .

JANE. Yes, that you're going into your father's business. Well, I think it's terrible.

BILL. Oh, it isn't so bad. I'm sure I'll get used to it.

JANE. I don't mean the stock business. I mean wasting yourself.

BILL. Wasting what? The ability to throw a baseball a little better than the next fellow? Do you think that's . . .

JANE. I think it's a gift, just like any other gift, and if you waste it, you're a fool. There!

BILL. But — but — you don't mean that a grown man ought to . . .

JANE. Oh, no, it's perfectly all right for a grown man to play around with figures and quotations that come off a ticker tape, but when it's something that takes real skill and thinking and good spirit and strength — oh, no!

BILL. Well — well, I'll admit I never looked at it that way. (*Almost with a smile.*) Gee! Just a few moments ago, on the phone, dad congratulated me for turning down this offer. Said it was beneath my dignity. Wonder what he'd say if — if . . .

JANE. You're old enough to know your own mind. You could try baseball for a few years, and if it didn't work out, you could always leave it for the brokerage business.

BILL (*nods*). Something in that.

JANE (*archly*). Besides, you never know. The Blue Sox are a pretty good team, and professional baseball is a

PLAY BALL!

lot tougher than college. You might not make the grade.

BILL (*determinedly*). Don't you worry. If I go into it, I'll fight.

JANE. Then you *will* go into it?

BILL. Well — I — I didn't say . . . say, does it really matter to you what I do?

JANE (*blushing a little*). Only from the Blue Sox point of view.

BILL. That all?

JANE. Of course. What else?

BILL. Look, if I should join up, would I see y . . . I mean, are you around here a lot?

JANE. Y-yes, quite a lot. Does it make any difference?

BILL. Oh, a lot of difference. (*Slowly.*) A lot of difference.

JANE. Well, well, the important thing is whether you want to be just another stockbroker, or an outstanding pitcher.

BILL. Gee, no one in my family's ever done anything like that for a living.

JANE. Maybe it's about time. What do you say?

BILL. You — you think it's a good idea?

JANE. I think it's a swell idea, for everyone concerned.

BILL. Well, then . . . (*He swallows.*) I'll do it.

JANE. Gee! Gee, that's great!

[*They look into each other's eyes for a moment. They are interrupted by Buck's return.*]

BUCK. Gosh, Jane, I can't stand watchin' those pitchers of ours. I had to come up and . . . (*Seeing Bill.*) Oh! You're still here!

BILL. Yes, and I'm staying.

BUCK. What!

JANE. He wants to join up, Buck!

BUCK. Wow! (*To Jane.*) What are you, a magician?

PLAY BALL!

BILL. No, she just talked sense. You could take a few lessons from her, Mr. Nichols.

BUCK. I can see that. (*Picking contract up.*) Well, young feller, here's your contract. You sign there.

BILL (*taking the pen and breathing deeply*). All right. Poor dad! (*He signs.*) There you are. I see there's a dotted line for the owner to sign. Who's the owner?

JANE (*putting out her hand*). Pen, please.

BILL. Here you are. (*She takes it and signs.*) What, you!

[*She nods.*]

BUCK. Palmer, meet your new boss. Bill Palmer, Jane Marshall.

BILL (*taking the hand she extends*). Well, I'll be horn-swoggled, to say the least!

JANE (*grasping his hand*). I'm *very* pleased to meet you, Mr. Palmer.

BILL. You know, you could have saved a lot of time.

JANE. How?

BILL. If you'd just told me at the beginning that you were the owner, you wouldn't have had to argue with me so long.

[*She laughs and blushes a little.*]

BUCK (*after a moment*). Well, Jane, you better let go of that hand. He's going to need it for pitching.

JANE (*confused*). Oh — er — of course.

BUCK. Now, young feller, if you'll come downstairs with me, I'll have them measure you for . . .

[*Mrs. McGuff sticks her head in left.*]

MRS. MCGUFF. Man out here by the name of Palmer. Says he's callin' for someone.

BILL. Dad! Good gravy! I almost forgot about him.

BUCK. Show him in, Mrs. McGuff.

[*Mrs. McGuff nods and withdraws.*]

JANE. Do — do you think he'll . . .

BILL. He may. I guess I'd better break the news to him myself. Do you mind if I see him alone, Mr. Nichols?

PLAY BALL!

BUCK. O.K. Hope it goes smoothly. Come along, Jane.

JANE (*to Bill*). Be gentle but firm.

BILL. Y-yeah.

[*Jane and Buck go out right. Bill clears his throat and straightens his tie. In a moment, G. D. Palmer comes in at left. He is a large, dignified man — exactly your idea of a prosperous stockbroker.*]

PALMER. Ah, William, there you are.

BILL. Hello, dad. Er — er — hello.

PALMER. Well, shall we be going? I must get back to the office as soon as we have lunch, and I suppose you have things to do.

BILL. I have something to do right now.

PALMER. Well, we can stop off on the way to my club.

(*Laughs.*) You know, that was very amusing, — what you told me over the phone. You, invited here and asked to become a professional athlete! Very amusing.

BILL. Maybe you won't think so long.

PALMER. Why not?

BILL. I've done it.

PALMER. What?

BILL. I've just signed a contract with the Blue Sox for three years.

PALMER. But — but — I don't understand . . .

BILL. I didn't, either, at first. But I do now.

PALMER. But — but — you said . . .

BILL. I know. It was true, then. It's not true, now.

PALMER. Well — well, frankly, William, I'm amazed.

BILL. I admit it's rather sudden.

PALMER. But not twenty minutes ago, you told me you turned down an offer from this — this Blue Sox Baseball Club.

BILL. That's right, I did.

PALMER. And I heartily approved. I was glad to see you get some good wholesome exercise in college. I played on my own college team. But, as for making a

PLAY BALL!

profession of sport, why, it was preposterous. You said so, and I agreed with you.

BILL. Yes, you — er — agreed with me, all right.

PALMER. And you tell me you've signed a contract with them. Right out of the blue.

BILL. Right out of the Blue Sox. (*Lamely.*) Ha! Ha!

PALMER. William, that is not funny.

BILL. Sorry, but — I've signed, and I'm going to play. They're very encouraging. They say I've got a great future.

PALMER. Future! In baseball! Why, it — it's ridiculous! That's no lifework. It's a — a diversion! Your place is with me, in my firm, G. D. Palmer, Stocks and Bonds.

BILL. I'm starting my own firm, William Palmer, Strikes and Balls.

PALMER. But you had your mind made up so firmly!

BILL. I know. I just — changed it.

PALMER. William, I am not one to jump to broad conclusions, am I?

BILL. No, you're not much of a broad-jumper.

PALMER. Eh? What's that?

BILL. Nothing. Go on.

PALMER. Well, I wish you'd stop muttering to yourself. Ahem! I do not jump to conclusions, but this sudden reversal of opinion on your part leads me to suspect — if not to believe — that there's a girl at the bottom of it.

BILL. Ah, *cherchez la femme!* (*Explanatorily.*) French.

PALMER. A French girl!

BILL. No, dad, American. But you're right; she is at the bottom of it. And when you see her, you'll darn soon know why. She's the most . . .

PALMER. Ahem, yes. I daresay she must be, to make you change this way. May I meet the young lady?

BILL. Sure. You might as well get to know her. You're going to see a lot of her. (*He goes to the door right.*)

PLAY BALL!

Jane. Mr. Nichols. (*They come in.*) Dad, this is Miss Jane Marshall, the owner of the Blue Sox.

JANE. How do you do, Mr. Palmer?

PALMER. The owner. H'mph. How do you do?

BILL. And Mr. Buck Nichols, the manager.

BUCK. How are ya?

PALMER. How do you do?

JANE. Well, I suppose Bill has broken the news.

PALMER. He has.

BUCK. I can see that you're not exactly wild about the idea.

PALMER (*coldly*). You're right, sir.

BUCK. Well, he signed a contract.

PALMER. I'd like to have a court look at that contract.

JANE. What objection have you, Mr. Palmer, to Bill's playing baseball?

PALMER. Just this, madam. That, for a lifework, I expected my son to do something sensible and worthwhile.

[*Mrs. McGuff bursts into the room at left, feather-duster in hand.*]

MRS. MCGUFF. Sensible! Worthwhile!

BUCK. Now, Mrs. McGuff . . .

MRS. MCGUFF. I beg your pardon, Mr. Nichols, but I couldn't help hearing what he said. I've been around this ball park longer than anyone here and I figure I have a right to speak when I hear baseball bein' insulted. (*To Palmer.*) Listen to me, you — buzzard. Up at Cooperstown, New York, where baseball was invented, there's a Baseball Museum, and in it there's a Hall of Fame with an Honor Roll. You know what some of the names on it are? Babe Ruth, Christy Matthewson, Ty Cobb, Grover Cleveland Alexander, Napoleon Lajoie, Wee Willie Keeler — names that go back twenty-five, thirty, thirty-five years. Now, Mr. Respectability, you name me one single stockbroker of thirty-five years ago!

PALMER. Well — er — I — er — offhand, I . . .

MRS. MCGUFF. See that? He can't do it! (*Peering*

PLAY BALL!

closer.) Wait a minute! I've seen your face before
I . . .

PALMER. Oh, no, impossible — I . . .

MRS. MCGUFF. Yes, a long time ago — somewhere about
1912 . . .

BILL. That's the year you graduated from the University
here, dad.

MRS. MCGUFF. That's it. He graduated from the University after playin' on the college team, and he came here to old Pete Marshall and asked him for a tryout on the Blue Sox!

PALMER. Why, that — that's — er — umph . . .

MRS. MCGUFF. And you couldn't make the grade. That's why you're so set against your son's playin' with them!

BILL. Dad! You never told me!

PALMER. Well, I — er — it's not exactly . . .

JANE. She has an awful good memory, Mr. Palmer. She never makes mistakes.

MRS. MCGUFF. You bet I don't. It was him all right.

PALMER. I — umph — well — er — um . . .

BUCK (*putting a friendly arm around Palmer's shoulders*).

Now, Mr. Palmer, if I was you, I'd forget all about these objections of yours. You know, I can look up the records of the club and find out whether Mrs. McGuff is telling the truth.

PALMER. Oh, no! — that is — er . . .

BUCK. Maybe you'd just rather come along and watch your son take his first workout with the Blue Sox.

PALMER. Well — er — perhaps that would be wiser.

BILL. Come along, dad.

JANE. And you can sit right in the grandstand next to me while we watch Bill knock them for a loop.

PALMER (*breaking into a smile*). For a loop! Ha! Ha! Thank you, my dear. I accept.

[*He goes out right, laughing, with Bill and Jane.*]

BUCK. Mrs. McGuff, when I walk out on the field, the fans

PLAY BALL!

cheer me as the manager. But when I look at you, I know who does most of the managing around here.

MRS. MCGUFF. Ah, go along! (*Like a schoolteacher.*)

And I want the Blue Sox to win this afternoon, do you hear?

BUCK (*like a schoolboy*). Yes, ma'am. Very good, ma'am.

MRS. MCGUFF. Now, be off, be off, I have work to do.

BUCK. Yes, ma'am.

[*He goes right. Mrs. McGuff snorts "H'mph." Then she hitches up her apron, and after flicking Buck's desk with her duster, she starts out left, whistling. The tune, of course, is "Take Me Out to the Ball Game."*]

Quick Curtain.

-

CHICO

By

HARRY C. GIBBS

Copyright, 1940, by Samuel French.

CAST

SCHNEIDER, *a wounded member of a band of cattle "rustlers," renegades and marauders.*

SISTER, *a Sister of Charity.*

BILLY THE KID, *a youthful outlaw and killer whose name is history throughout that section of the country which was formerly the Territory of New Mexico.*

TOMAS, *the typical "chili pickin' greaser" who is all the name implies.*

RANCE, *a member of Billy's gang. A case-hardened "drifter."*

CHARLEY, *another member of the gang. "Muy malo hombre." Two other unnamed members of the gang.*

TIME. A September morning in the year 1876.

PLACE. An abandoned adobe hut near Dick Wooten's toll gate, the point of entry between Colorado and New Mexico, and just outside the town of Trinidad, Colorado.

[AUTHOR'S NOTE: For the result of my efforts I am indebted to Sister Blandina Segale, from whose book "At the End of the Santa Fe Trail" I gained the skeleton structure of my plot and the key to her character which I have attempted to portray. I am further indebted to my father and my mother who made their home in the colorful Southwestern State of New Mexico where I lived until the time of my entrance to Washington University. Since my early childhood I have been an eager absorber of the "earthy" glamour and romance of that part of our country which was so recently "frontier country," and am fortunate in being able to number among my friends four old pioneers who were personally acquainted with Billy the Kid, who lives again as one of the principal characters of my play.

In order to gain certain dramatic effects during the course of the play, I have called upon my imagination to supply some situations which are essentially fictional in their make-up. Thus it is that the play is a sort of tapestry of truth embroidered here and there with threads of fiction. At all times, however, I have striven to present the Sister, and Billy the Kid, absolutely "as they were." Their characterization is the most sincere attempt at truth of which I am capable.]

CHICO

The interior of the adobe hut. The hut is crudely furnished. There is a bunk upstage right — a door opening inward with the knob stage right upstage center — a dilapidated two-lid stove downstage left — a table upstage left center — a small window in the right wall — a few rickety chairs — and other debris such as squatters et cetera are apt to leave behind them.

As the curtain rises, a man is tossing fitfully upon the bunk. He is apparently of medium age and height. His face is covered by several days' growth of whiskers, his eyes are of an indiscriminate color, and his mouth is slack. The upper part of his body, which is not covered by an old ragged patchwork quilt, is encased in a ragged blue work shirt and through the rents in this shirt a dirty white bandage peeps occasionally. The man seems depressed and in a state of mental and physical agony as he tosses to and fro, touching the wound in his chest from time to time. Struck by a sudden thought he reaches beneath his pillow and draws forth a Frontier Model, single action, Colt revolver and looks at it grimly. As he contemplates the revolver he seems to be striving to arrive at some decision. After a moment he appears to have reached his decision and he slowly turns the muzzle of the gun toward his temple.

At this point a woman enters from the door center. She is about twenty-three years of age, with attractive features, and walks with a firm and determined stride. She is dressed in the habiliments of a Sister of Charity. Taking in the situation at a glance, she moves swiftly to the man on the bunk and seizes the gun from his grasp.

SISTER. Bed is not the place for target shooting, Mr. Schneider.

CHICO

[*She lays the revolver on a chair near the head of the bunk.*]

SCHNEIDER. Yuh shore spiled a sartin bull's-eye, Sister. (*He seems angry that she should have interrupted him and grumbles.*) Another minit an' I'd 'a' finished the job Happy started when he plugged me.

SISTER (*ignoring the incident, and commencing to straighten up the room, putting away food, bandages, etc., which she had dropped as she leaped to stop the attempted suicide. She piles her bundles upon the stove.*) Well, now, how is your wound today? Much better, I trust.

SCHNEIDER (*grudgingly*). It's painin' me, if thet's whut yuh mean . . . and . . . yuh know as well as I do thet I'm due to cash in my chips one of these days soon. No harm in hurryin' the job up a little, is there?

SISTER. I wasn't aware that that was what you were doing. Why should you?

SCHNEIDER. Yuh ain't bin in tuh see me fer a couple o' days, an' the grub was givin' out, an' the hole in my hide (*Indicating the bandages.*) was a-hurtin', an' . . . well . . . I figgered thet ef yuh had given up, I'd jest as well.

SISTER (*not disturbed by his whining*). Well, you're certainly in a sour frame of mind this morning, aren't you? But then, you usually are. I've been busy at the Convent, but I sent you some food by Carmelita Aragon every day.

[*Continuing her work unwrapping, etc.*]

SCHNEIDER. Well, she never got here. (*Still rather grudgingly.*) Guess yo're the only one in these parts thet gives a keer whut happens tuh me.

SISTER. I suppose Carmelita took the food to her family. I can't find it in my heart to blame her . . . the poor thing has twelve children. (*Shakes her head.*) Tsch, tsch. And as far as you're concerned, a bullet in the head is probably the only thing that will ever cure you.

CHICO

I wonder that the gentleman you . . . shot it out with . . . didn't finish you off.

SCHNEIDER (*a note of admiration which he cannot suppress creeps into his voice*). By Tophet! Thet's some talk. Yuh shore savvy the kinda words tuh use on an hombre like me. Yo're a good 'un all right. Reckon I owe a lot tuh yuh.

SISTER. If that is meant for flattery or gratitude, kindly refrain. I don't want your thanks . . . I'm merely pursuing my Christian duty as I see it.

SCHNEIDER. *Bueno*, Sister, I savvy.

SISTER. Now, I would like to have a look at that wound, if you please.

[*She takes bandages and antiseptic from the top of stove where she has laid them and passes above the bunk and commences to examine his wound, which appears to be through the ribs slightly above the abdomen. As she prys about Schneider winces.*]

SCHNEIDER. Aieeee! Dammit, yo're hurtin' me.

SISTER. Don't curse, Mr. Schneider. (*Goes calmly on about her work as he winces again.*) And don't wiggle so. Put your mind on something else.

SCHNEIDER (*gloomily*). *Bueno*. (*There is a brief pause as the Sister continues to dress the wound, then suddenly a great light appears to dawn upon Mr. Schneider, and he grins.*) Say, yuh ever heerd o' Billy the Kid, my jefe?

SISTER (*intent upon her work*). Your what?

SCHNEIDER. Aiee! (*As the business of dressing the wound pains him.*) My jefe . . . my captain . . . the ramrod of the outfit I run with.

SISTER. Billy the Kid? Yes, I've heard of him. What person in this lawless section of the country hasn't? You say you're a member of his gang?

SCHNEIDER. Shore am . . . an' proud tuh be. Why, Billy the Kid is the quickest drawin', straightest shootin'

CHICO

gun toter in the territory. He ain't afeerd o' nuthin' human. He's young too, an' han'some as they come.

SISTER (*as she finishes dressing the wound*). There, now. That should hold you for a day or two.

SCHNEIDER. He's a killer, too. Why, he's only twenty years old an' he's already kilt a man fer ever' year o' his life. (*After a pause and seeking to be impressive. The Sister is apparently paying no attention as she places the bandages, etc., on the table and turns to the stove with the food she has brought for the wounded man.*)

That makes it *twenty men* he's kilt.

SISTER. An amazingly rapid calculation, Mr. Schneider. Your Billy the Kid must have gotten off to an early start in life.

SCHNEIDER. Yeah . . . he did. I figger when he was about thuteen he was killin' Indians. (*Scornfully.*) 'Course he ain't never tallied them with the twenty.

SISTER. Why does he overlook Indians? (*Ironically.*) They're human beings.

SCHNEIDER (*missing the irony*). Sho, now, Sister, the Kid figgers they ain't wuth countin'. 'Lows he like tuh shoot 'em tho . . . it tickles him tuh see 'em drop off their hosses. Yuh jest oughta see him.

SISTER (*dryly*). He certainly seems to have a well-developed sense of humor. What else does he shoot at?

SCHNEIDER. The Kid don't shoot *at* anything, Sister . . . he hits 'em.

SISTER. What an exceptional young man.

SCHNEIDER (*with the air of one who knows and is willing to tell a bit of startling news*). How'd yuh admire tuh meet him?

SISTER. Me? Why, it would be an interesting but I'm afraid a rather unpleasant experience. I don't suppose there is much chance of that happening, however.

SCHNEIDER (*quite gleeful about something*). I wouldn't make any wagers on thet.

SISTER. What do you mean, Mr. Schneider?

CHICO

SCHNEIDER. Jest whut I said.

SISTER. But you said . . .

SCHNEIDER. Yep, I did . . . an' I meant it. (*With the air of one who imparts amazing news.*) I was a-painin' so thet I'd clean fergot it until a minit ago, but now yuh fixed me up, I'm feelin' kinda chipper an' it puts me in mind o' sompin.

SISTER. What does it . . . put you in mind . . . of?

SCHNEIDER. Billy an' the whole shootin' match is due in here. Mebbe today.

SISTER. But why are they coming here?

SCHNEIDER. I got news tuh 'em, an' they're a-comin' by tuh see me on their way tuh town.

SISTER. I . . . I'm sure you must be pleased, but I don't think I'll stay to see them.

[*She begins to gather her belongings preparatory to leaving.*]

SCHNEIDER. Shucks, Sister. I told them all about yuh. They kinda hanker tuh meet yuh, I bet.

SISTER. I'm sorry, but I don't share their . . . hanker-ing.

SCHNEIDER (*persuasively*). They won't be here long, an' 'sides, yuh ain't fixed me any grub.

SISTER. None of this food requires cooking and I don't think you will need my help to eat it. (*Turns to go . . . then, as a thought occurs to her.*) What are your friends going to town for?

SCHNEIDER (*forgetting himself for a moment, a note of menace creeps into his voice*). They got some . . . business . . . in town.

SISTER (*catching the note*). What business could a band of outlaws have in Trinidad?

SCHNEIDER (*realizing that he has gone too far and trying to cover up*). Jest business, Sister. Nuthin' fer yuh tuh worry about.

SISTER (*her suspicions aroused*). Mr. Schneider! You're hiding something.

CHICO

SCHNEIDER (*irritably*). No, I ain't. Couldn't they be goin' fer grub er suthin'?

SISTER. They could be . . . but I gather from your conversation that there's something else and I mean to find out what.

SCHNEIDER. Dammit . . . don't badger me!

SISTER. I will . . . badger . . . you until I find out what this "business" is.

SCHNEIDER (*angry at her insistence*). *Bueno!* Yo're wantin' tuh know an' I'm goin' tuh tell yuh. Won't do no harm, I reckon.

SISTER. Come, come. Get on with your story.

SCHNEIDER. D'yuh recollect them four dirty sawbones thet live here in Trinidad? (*Bitterly.*) The ones as wouldn't tech my wounds when Happy got done shootin' me up?

SISTER (*eager to get his story*). Yes, I know three of them very well. One of them is our Convent physician.

SCHNEIDER. Purty hi-falutin' medicos, ain't they? Wouldn't have nuthin' tuh do with a drifter in off th' trail like me.

SISTER. They're gentlemen, Mr. Schneider, and they believe that your kind are better off dead.

SCHNEIDER. Them "gentlemen" are gonna git a little come-down.

SISTER. What do you mean?

SCHNEIDER. Well, Billy an' th' boys are gonna scalp them "gentlemen," th' lot o' 'em . . . an' nail their gentle hair tuh th' door o' th' Trinidad jail house. Now, what d'yuh think o' thet?

SISTER (*shaken*). But why are they going to do such a thing . . . why?

SCHNEIDER. 'Cause not a one o' th' yaller-bellies 'd offer tuh take th' lead outa my carcass.

SISTER. But . . . that's surely no reason for such barbarity.

CHICO

SCHNEIDER. Billy an' th' gang ain't never needed much reason fer raisin' hell. Fact is . . . they kinda enjoy it.

SISTER. But think . . . think of those innocent men . . . and their families.

SCHNEIDER (*enjoying the Sister's pleadings*). I ain't much on thinkin' . . . never was.

SISTER. But the people of Trinidad need them, need them desperately. They're the only medical men for hundreds of miles. Without those men a single epidemic of typhoid could wipe out the whole town in a short time.

SCHNEIDER. I ain't keerin' much about thet.

SISTER (*seeing the uselessness of pleading*). Well, I am. They've got to be stopped. They must be.

SCHNEIDER. Hell! They ain't nobody in these parts kin stop 'em. They're dead bent on this hair raisin', an' all hell can't stop 'em.

SISTER (*clutches her crucifix and turns away walking down stage left, talking more to herself than to him as she thinks rapidly*). But with the aid of Heaven, I must. (*Brief pause as Schneider watches her as a cat watches a mouse. Then turning to him.*) Do you believe that with this knowledge I'm going to keep still?

SCHNEIDER. Whut are yuh aimin' t' do about it?

[*He furtively glances at his revolver where it lies on the chair near the head of his bunk.*]

SISTER (*agitatedly turning toward the stove*). I . . . I don't quite know . . . yet.

[*Glances at the door. Schneider is watching her closely as she does so.*]

SCHNEIDER (*edging toward his gun, and with an ugly tone in his voice*). Stick around a mite, Sister. (*She is edging toward the door and at the same time attempting to maintain a poker face as she observes his movements toward the gun.*) Warnin' them sawbones wouldn' do 'em no good. Billy'd git 'em sooner er later.

CHICO

SISTER (*one eye on Schneider and the gun and the other on the door, and attempting to allay his suspicions*). Yes, I suppose he would.

SCHNEIDER (*up on one elbow with an obvious effort, as his wound deters him*). Why, yuh'd orta be proud tuh meet Billy anyways. It'd be some thrill, I figger.

SISTER. A pleasure, I'm sure, but I . . .

[*Here Schneider lunges for the gun, which costs him not a little agony from his wound, but the Sister, who has been watching for just such a move, leaps suddenly toward him and, with a well-placed kick, sends gun and chair to the floor just before Schneider's hand can close about the handle of the gun. She then pushes the weakened Schneider back upon the bunk decisively as the frustrated bandit utters a potent curse.*]

SCHNEIDER. Dammit!

SISTER. There! That takes care of you for a time. I'm going to town and . . .

[*She is starting for the door when she is interrupted by a long high-pitched cowboy yell nearby, accompanied by the clatter of horses' hoofs. The Sister stops dead still, realizing that she is caught.*]

SCHNEIDER (*laughing in a manner which might well be described as fiendish*). Thet'd be Billy. Yo're caught, ain't yuh? . . . in spite o' yo're quick kickin'. Whut're yuh gonna do now?

SISTER (*the look of hopelessness which covered her face when she realized that she was caught gives way to one of determination*). Yes, I'm caught. (*She appears to be making a decision.*) And I'll stay. I'll meet your precious renegade and his gang . . . and, Heaven helping me, I'll stop them right here.

SCHNEIDER. Yo're bitin' off too big a chaw there, Sister.

SISTER. Well, I'm biting it, Mr. Schneider, and I'll chew it.

SCHNEIDER (*perplexed*). Damned ef yuh don't talk different'n any religious womern I ever seen. I . . .

[*He is interrupted by a furor of shouted orders, jingling*

CHICO

spurs, and saddle trappings outside. It is apparent that the outlaws have arrived. Schneider and the Sister both listen for a moment, Schneider with a pleased look upon his face. The Sister seems frightened . . . then making a definite effort, she pulls herself together and looks about her. Her eyes light on the stove, and taking some food from the table, she walks calmly to the stove and pretends to busy herself there . . . glancing momentarily and expectantly toward the door through which in a few minutes, with a terrific sweep and jingle of spurs, Billy the Kid enters. He is twenty years old, slightly above average height, and slender. His hands, as described by those who knew him, are "like a woman's," and his cheeks are smooth, having never needed a razor. He is blond with blue eyes and is rather handsome. He wears regular range garb: boots, hat with wide brim and high crown, trousers, grey flannel shirt, vest, neckerchief, and one forty-five caliber revolver "tied down" securely to his right thigh and supported by a cartridge belt well filled with ammunition. He is followed by a native whose name we soon learn is Tomas. Tomas is a rather greasy, coffee-colored Mexican of about middle age. He is fat and his eyes reflect no intellect. He is dressed in boots, "vaquero pants" tight about the calf of his leg, a dirty shirt, concha belt, neckerchief, and Mexican "sombbrero." He wears two revolvers also "tied down," and besides these weapons he carries a large bowie knife in a sheath beneath his left armpit. Billy goes immediately to the man on the bunk, not seeing the Sister. He speaks in the lingo of New Mexico, a quaint mixture of Spanish and English, which is characteristic of the country, and one notices a drawl which is not a "Southern" nor "Texas" accent, but peculiar to the inhabitants of the Southwest.

BILLY. Buenos dias, amigo . . . how in th' hell are yuh . . . yuh ol' son of a . . . (Interrupted by Schneider's gesticulations in the Sister's direction, he turns and sees her. Immediately he removes his hat with a flourish

CHICO

and, bowing low, speaks with a softened voice.) I beg yore pardon, Ma'am. I swear I didn' see yuh standin' there. *(Somewhat rattled, he looks about and his eyes light upon Tomas standing stupidly by, staring with wide open mouth.)* Oye! Tomas. *(With a sweep of his hand he tumbles Tomas' hat to the floor.)* Bow tuh the Sister!

TOMAS *(glancing briefly at the Kid with the veiled animosity of which only a "greaser" is capable).* Si, El Chico, si.

[He bows, retrieves his hat, then seats himself upon the floor with his back against the wall, upstage left, and busies himself with his bowie knife, paying no attention to the following proceedings.]

BILLY *(not seeing the glance Tomas has given him).*

Yuh'll have tuh excuse Tomas, Ma'am. He's jest an ignerant cholo.

SISTER. At least he doesn't come bursting into a room with his mouth full of curses.

BILLY *(somewhat surprised and bowing low).* Yo're right, Ma'am. *(Straightening up with a smile.)* His mouth ain't ever fulla anything 'ceptin' chili 'n' beans.

SISTER *(playing along).* A tedious diet, I should think.

BILLY *(laughing appreciatively).* It shore is, Ma'am.

SISTER. You may address me as Sister.

BILLY *(with another bow).* Yes, Sister.

SISTER. Aren't you afraid you'll get a kink in your back?

BILLY. Huh? No, Ma'am, I mean . . . no, Sister. I mean . . . *(Grins ruefully and scratches his head . . . then to Schneider.)* Hell! *(Turns to Sister.)* Beggin' yore pardon, Sister. *(Then back to Schneider.)* I know now whut yuh meant when yuh said th' little Sister almost had yuh buffaloed.

SISTER *(decisively).* Mr. Schneider is not almost . . . buffaloed . . . as you say. He is completely buffaloed.

BILLY *(laughing heartily to Schneider's immense discomfort).* I bet my last blue he is. Yo're a good 'un,

CHICO

Sister. I reckon there ain't a *livin'* bein' in the territory that'd venture tuh palaver back and forth with me like yuh jest done.

SISTER. Then the territory is in worse condition than I thought.

BILLY (*smiling*). Yuh win this hand, Sister. I'll drop.

SISTER (*gaining courage from her success*). I can't understand a territory that allows itself to be almost ruled by outlaws.

BILLY (*sobering*). Beggin' yore pardon, Sister, but in this part o' th' country th' line thet divides the law an' th' outlaw is near as fine as a frog's hair. There ain't much diff'rence atween 'em. It's dawg eat dawg an' th' hombre with th' quickest hand and the sartinest eye eats most often. (*Patting his holstered gun.*) This is th' law out here.

SISTER. But you're a young man. There is hope for you. Why don't you give up this life and begin again . . . now?

BILLY. Begin again? I'm afeerd not.

[*He shakes his head slowly.*]

SISTER. But why not?

BILLY. I mind th' time Ginneral Lew Wallace, Governor o' th' Territory o' New Mexico, offered me thet chance, Sister . . . ef I'd quit totin' my guns.

SISTER. Why didn't you take it then?

BILLY (*envisioning it*). I rec'lect how Lew sent fer me tuh meet him in Santa Fe. Well, Ma'am, we was sittin' there on th' plaza a-talkin'. Then Lew says . . . Billy, I'll grant yuh a full an' unconditional pardon an' yore freedom . . . ef yuh'll promise me not tuh pack yore guns no more. An' I said tuh him, Lew, take a look down thet street. (*Billy points.*) I couldn' walk ten steps down thet street 'thout my irons . . . er any other street. Mira! Yuh see thet fella sittin' over there agin' th' wall? I killed his saddle pard when I was takin' part in th' Lincoln County War . . . a-

CHICO

fightin' fer th' little cow man agin' th' big 'un. How fur do yuh think I could walk afore thet fella'd shoot me like a settin' sage hen? An' he ain't th' only 'un . . . there's others, with like reasons. *No hay chanca, amigo*, thankin' yuh jest th' same. It's too late . . . ever' man's hands agin' me an' I'm lookin' out after my hide. (*Then firmly changing the subject.*) Now, how is Schneider here gittin' along?

SISTER. Very well, I believe, Mr. . . . uh . . . uh . . . Kid?

BILLY. Bonney, Sister, William H. Bonney.

SISTER. Mr. Bonney . . . thank you. Mr. Schneider was in a very serious condition when I undertook his care, but I trust that he will come around all right in time.

BILLY. I reckon he will, an' ef he does, he owes it complete tuh yuh. I hear ef yuh hadn't helped him he'd a-layed here an' died.

SISTER. Modesty forbids me to say, Mr. Bonney.

BILLY. Well, yuh don't have tuh. I know, an' I think it was mighty fine o' yuh, Ma'am. I shore do.

SISTER. Mr. Schneider is one of your men, he tells me.

BILLY. Why, yes, Ma'am, he is, an' I wanta say thet anybody does a favor fer one o' my men is th' same as doin' one fer me.

SISTER. I appreciate the sentiment.

BILLY. It's more'n a sentiment, Sister. I'm thankin' yuh fer me an' th' boys, 'counta whut yuh done fer Schneider here.

SISTER. I find your gratitude very touching.

SCHNEIDER. I cain't help wonderin' ef th' boys are as grateful.

BILLY (*ignoring this and outdoing himself in gallantry*). An' I wanta say thet it'd pleasure me considerable tuh do yuh any favor I kin.

SCHNEIDER. Watch yoreself, Billy, she's . . .

CHICO

BILLY (*not to be interrupted in his gallantry*). Button yore lip, Schneider.

SISTER (*leaping to take advantage of the opportunity and struggling to keep her head*). Any favor?

[*Schneider attempts a protest. The Sister for a minute thinks that all she is working for is slipping from her grasp and her face portrays the mingled emotions of fear, anger, and an expression of hopelessness.*]

BILLY (*all steel and ice*). I'm doin' the talkin', Schneider. Not you.

SCHNEIDER. But, Billy, I . . .

BILLY (*suppressed rage*). Yuh ain't drawin' any cards in this game. Drop out. (*He pats his holstered gun gently but warningly and Schneider is forced much against his will to subside. A look of triumph flashes across the Sister's face, then Billy speaks again.*) As I was sayin', any favor yuh want thet I kin give is yores. 'Course I reckon it won't be anythin' in my regular line since I guess yuh wouldn' be wantin' anybody killed . . . er any cattle . . . borrowed.

SISTER. I might . . . but as you say, that's not in *my* line.

BILLY. Shore not. Well, kin yuh figger on somethin' I kin do fer yuh?

SISTER. Yes. There is one favor you could grant me.

BILLY (*bowing low*). State it, Sister, an' it's as good as done.

[*Schneider is in a state of frenzied consternation but dares not speak for fear of the Kid.*]

SISTER. Do you mean what you say?

BILLY. I ain't never said anythin' I didn' mean, Ma'am.

SISTER (*taking the plunge*). What are you and your men doing here?

BILLY (*surprised at the change in tactics*). Why, we come tuh see Schneider, but I don't see . . .

SISTER. There was something else, wasn't there?

CHICO

BILLY. I don't know whut yuh mean, Ma'am.

[Playing dumb.]

SISTER. I think you do.

BILLY (*complete realization*). Has he bin exercisin' his tongue?

SISTER. Rather strenuously, I'm afraid, Mr. Bonney.

[Schneider is now too frightened to attempt a word in his own defense and looks fearfully at the Kid.]

BILLY. Then yuh know. Well, beggin' yore pardon, Sister, but we swore tuh have th' hair o' every sawbones in Trinidad . . . an' yuh know why.

SISTER. Yes, I do. And the favor I ask of you is this: Leave now, without harming these doctors . . . and don't come back.

BILLY (*somewhat flustered*). Schneider, yuh damn fool.

SCHNEIDER (*flaring a bit*). I was tryin' tuh tell yuh, but yuh wouldn' lissen. I'd a shot her but she kicked my gun outa my hand.

BILLY. Thet'd be a fitten way tuh make up fer yer tongue a-waggin'. It's a good thing fer yuh yuh didn't. I'd a had yore head an' a slab o' yore side, damn yuh.

SISTER. Your favor, Mr. Bonney.

BILLY. Yuh kinda got me where th' hair's short, Sister, but I cain't . . . I mean . . . the boys . . .

SCHNEIDER. Yeah . . . th' boys ain't gonna keer fer yer fancy favors much, Kid.

SISTER. Did you mean what you said, Mr. Bonney?

BILLY. I gave thet favor afore I knowed whut it was.

SISTER. Do you intend to . . . welch?

[The Sister is staying right in there, never letting up for a moment.]

BILLY. El Chico don't welch, Ma'am.

SISTER. Then you're afraid of your gang.

BILLY (*making his decision*). I'll take keer o' them.

Looks like yuh win th' big pot o' th' evenin', Sister. (*To Tomas, who all this time has been sitting on the floor*

CHICO

very much taken up with cleaning his nails, nose, and teeth, with his knife.) Oye! Tomas!

TOMAS. Si, Chico. *¿Qué quiere?*

BILLY. *Vamos por los hombres.* An' tell 'em I said tuh git in th' saddle an' head fer camp.

TOMAS (*puzzled*). But Beelee, the doctors . . . *¿qué paso?*

BILLY. The hair party's off. Now do like I told yuh. *Pronto!*

TOMAS (*half sadly, half angrily, as he runs his thumb down the edge of his knife*). No scalpeeng?

BILLY. No scalpin'. Git!

TOMAS (*reluctantly putting away his knife and starting for the door*). I don' lak thees, Keed.

BILLY (*steely*). *Pronto, bobo, pronto.*

TOMAS (*with a characteristic shrug of the shoulders*). *Bueno, bueno.*

[*Exits.*]

SCHNEIDER. Are th' boys jest outside, Billy?

BILLY. Yeah. We figgered tuh come in an' see yuh, two at a time.

SISTER. I'm sure that Mr. Schneider could stand more than two visitors at a time.

BILLY. It ain't thet, Sister. I jest don't figger on gettin' snuck up on.

SCHNEIDER. The gang ain't gonna be pleased over gettin' cheated outa their fun, Billy.

BILLY. Mebbe not. (*After a pause.*) They don't seem tuh be leavin' very fast. We may be in fer a little argyment. (*Approaching mumblings outside.*) An' it 'pears we are. Sit tight, Sister. I'll handle 'em.

[*At this point the door opens and some of the "boys" file wordlessly in. They are a savage looking crew of five, counting Tomas, who has returned with them. They are all dressed in regular range attire and are armed to the teeth. Their spokesman is a tall case-hardened looking*

CHICO

hombre who answers to the name of Rance. As they file in their bearing is full of menace and the atmosphere becomes heavily charged. Billy calmly surveys them and for a brief space there is no sound save that of heavy breathing as the men eye their leader . . . then Billy speaks.

BILLY. I see some o' yuh have come in tuh give me a little chin music. (*Then lashing out.*) I thought I said tuh hit th' trail fer camp? (*Pause as no one answers.*) Didn' Tomas tell yuh?

RANCE. Yeah, he told us. (*Leering at the Sister.*) No wonder yuh been in here so long. (*Indicating the Sister with a jerk of his head in her direction.*) Why didn' yuh tell us . . . have we quit sharin' alike in this outfit?

BILLY. Yuh keep yore foul tongue in yore head, Rance . . . er yuh'll answer tuh me.

RANCE (*insultingly*). Shore, Kid . . . didn' go tuh rile yuh.

BILLY. An' th' rest o' yuh coyotes. Where's yore manners, yuh cholos? Take off them greasy sombreros an' meet th' Sister thet's been takin' keer o' Schneider.

[*They do so with some reluctance and mumble their greetings.*]

SISTER (*not quite steadily*). I . . . I'm pleased, I'm sure.

BILLY. Now mebbe yuh better tell me why yuh ain't on yore way tuh camp.

RANCE. We ain't goin' jest yet, Kid.

BILLY. No . . . an' why ain't yuh?

RANCE. We calc'late tuh go tuh Trinidad first.

BILLY (*levelly*). I said th' hair party's off.

RANCE. We'd kinda admire tuh know why, ef it ain't too much fuss fer yuh.

TOMAS. We don' lak eet, Keed.

BILLY (*still evenly*). Yuh lissen tuh me, yuh misgot sheep herders. I give the orders on this spread. An' yuh take 'em.

CHICO

RANCE. Yeah, we take 'em. Ef we like 'em. Ain't thet so, boys?

[*The "boys" signify that that is the way they feel about the matter too.*]

BILLY. I'm still ramroddin' this outfit. I give th' orders . . . an' yuh like 'em, all of 'em, don't yuh? Yo're damn right, yuh do. (*He is moving with his back half turned to the group that has spread itself out below Schneider's bunk in a sort of half-moon formation which runs from a point near the door to a point near the middle of the wall stage right. He moves toward the Sister, who stands petrified in the probable line of fire.*) An' anybody thet don't like 'em kin go fer his gun, an' sudden too, ef there's one o' yuh with guts enough. (*Apparently he is centering his whole attention now upon Tomas, who is on the stage left end of the half-moon formation, as he thus encourages Rance to draw, since he has picked Rance as the chief trouble maker. He addresses Tomas.*) Well, yuh stinkin' greaser. How about yuh? Go on, draw yore iron. (*He looks steadily at Tomas, whose eyes drop to the floor.*) No? (*Turning to another of the group, who is on Tomas' right.*) How about yuh, Charley? Yo're allus makin' big brags about th' notches on yo're gun han'l. Draw it, yuh yella . . . (*By now Rance has worked up his nerve and starts his draw. Billy, hearing his hand slap leather, goes into action. He whirls and, with a sweeping motion of his left arm, he throws the Sister to the floor out of the line of fire and draws with his right and fires, beating Rance to it. The other members of the gang, taken by surprise, stare as Rance sways and drops, his gun barely clear of its holster. Billy coolly surveys the group as he blows the smoke from his gun barrel.*) Step up! Which one o' yuh sheep men is honin' tuh be next? (*There is a pause as he meets their eyes, and their eyes wander from the smoking gun to Rance's body and back again.*) Nobody? (*He seems disappointed.*)

CHICO

Well, vamoose! An' take whut's left o' Rance with yuh. Leave him on Bald Knob . . . he'll make good buzzard bait. (*As they move to do his bidding.*) Now, adios, *compañeros*. See yuh at camp. (*They leave, taking the dead man's body with them. Billy turns swiftly to the Sister and helps her gently to her feet. She sways a bit and he steadies her, then speaks.*) I'm turrible sorry, Sister. I wush I coulda got by without the killin', but it's th' only language they savvy.

SISTER. I . . . I . . . this is my first experience with sudden death. It's . . .

BILLY. Shore, Ma'am. (*Helping her to a chair stage left.*) Yuh jest set a little an' yuh'll feel all right. (*She sinks into the chair and takes a long breath.*) There, Ma'am. Yuh feel better?

SISTER. Yes . . . yes . . . but it was so sudden . . . so . . . so . . .

SCHNEIDER (*tactlessly*). I'm shore glad the Sister got tuh see yuh in action, Billy. I told . . .

BILLY. Shut up, Schneider. (*Schneider looks disappointed.*) I wush we had a little shot o' red likker fer yuh, Sister, only I reckon yuh don't drink it none.

SISTER. Well, I . . . reckon . . . I would this time.

BILLY. Yo're a game 'un, Ma'am. Yuh shore are. (*After a brief pause.*) I figger yuh see now whut I meant by dawg eat dawg.

SISTER (*unable to openly condone the killing, but realizing that it was the almost inevitable result of the situation*). But this man's death . . . "Thou shalt not kill."

BILLY. It was him er th' doctors, Ma'am.

SISTER. I don't know . . . his death may have been a sacrifice to save four other and more useful lives.

BILLY. Shucks now, Sister, Rance wasn't no sacrifice, I reckon. I kin git another gun toter tuh take his place in not more'n a couple o' days. It don't put me out a bit.

CHICO

SISTER (*a bit horrified at his callousness*). Please, Mr. Bonney.

BILLY (*realizing how his attitude must affect the Sister*). Sorry, Ma'am. Guess I fergot myself a minit.

SISTER (*making an effort to become her normal self*). Although you overstepped the bounds, I can't help but believe that for a while you were an instrument of good today, Mr. Bonney, if you never were before.

BILLY. I shore do thank yuh, Ma'am.

SISTER (*recovering rapidly now*). We made a good trade, didn't we? My care of Mr. Schneider, for the lives of four good men.

BILLY (*smiling*). Yo're a sharp trader, Sister. An' I wanta say thet ef I kin ever be of any service tuh yuh er any member o' yore order, I shore will. My word on it, and ef yuh don't mind, Sister . . . my hand.

SISTER (*as they shake hands*). Thank you, Billy the Kid. (*Brief pause.*) I must go now. I have a full day ahead of me at the Convent.

[*She turns to go.*]

BILLY. *Uno momento*, Sister.

[*She turns at the door.*]

SISTER. Yes?

BILLY. Did yuh ever play any poker?

SISTER. Of course not, Mr. Bonney. Sisters of Charity don't play cards.

BILLY. Shore not. But yuh oughta try it sometime.

SISTER. Yes? Why?

BILLY. Why, yore mind works better an' faster'n any poker player's I ever knowed. Yuh oughta try it.

SISTER. I think I might like to sometime.

[*She starts once more to go.*]

BILLY. Yuh know, Ma'am, this little game o' tradin' we played here today, it 'minded me a lot o' poker.

SISTER. Did it?

BILLY. Yeah. Poker an' shootin' a six gun allus was th'

CHICO

two things I did best, an' yuh shore beat me at poker.
SISTER. Well, Mr. Bonney, Mr. Schneider there will tell you that I'm pretty . . . handy . . . with my feet . . . and if I'm as quick with my hands as I am with my feet . . . I wouldn't be surprised if I could beat you at your other game, too. Good day, gentlemen.

[*Exits.*]

SCHNEIDER. Well, I'll be damned!

BILLY. Schneider, yore jaw's danglin' agin. (*Schneider, somewhat hurt, subsides. Billy, looking in the direction which the Sister has taken and with hat in hand, makes another low bow in recognition of his victorious combatant.*) Adios, hermana chiquita.

SCHNEIDER. Whut in hell yuh talkin' aboot?

BILLY. Shut up, Schneider.

[*Schneider does so. After thinking a moment Billy suddenly takes out his gun and walks slowly to the table. He half leans and half sits against it and takes out a stock knife with which he begins to carve upon the handle of his gun. He seems very thoughtful and intent upon his work.*]

SCHNEIDER. Whut yuh doin', Kid?

BILLY. Cuttin' a notch.

SCHNEIDER. Fer Rance?

BILLY. Yep.

SCHNEIDER (*admiringly*). Thet makes it tally twenty-one, don't it?

BILLY. Yep. (*As he finishes, he snaps the knife shut and puts it in his pocket.*) Yuh know, Rance came in kinda handy after all. I've got a birthday . . . day after tomorrow.

[*Looks at Schneider soberly for a minute, then a grin spreads over his features, followed by the same action on Schneider's face, and they both burst out laughing heartily as the curtain comes down.*]

AMONG THE AUTHORS

MARCUS BACH of the University of Iowa playwriting group is the author of *Flag Stop* and a number of other one-act plays, and has recently published one complete volume of religious dramas entitled, "Vesper Dramas."

DELIA VAN DEUSEN is a novelist as well as a one-act playwright. Her play, *Tea-Time for Shelley's Faun*, was included in Volume I of this series. Her mystery novel, "Murder Bicarb," recently came from the press. *Rendezvous — American Style* (included here) was produced in Hudson, New York by the Parish Players.

W. BRANCH JOHNSON, author of *Saturday Night at the Halfway House*, is a native of Ireland.

Don't Feed the Animals, by BOB WELLINGTON, was produced by the Hollywood Professional Players in April of 1939.

JANE DRANSFIELD, author of *Mal Treloare*, is well known for several short poetic dramas and for her lectures on dramatic subjects.

PEGGY OLIVER (*Little Darling*) is a pen-name for a popular writer of short comedies.

MARION WEFER, author of *A King Shall Reign!*, has won recognition for several of her short religious dramas.

BERT GRISCOM, author of "*Utter Relaxation*," is well-known for several one-act comedies.

WELDON STONE, author of *The Miracle of Tony Assisi*, but best known for his *Devil Take a Whittler* plays, was represented in Volume I of this series by *A Darksome Furriner*. *The Miracle of Tony Assisi* received first prize in the Northwestern Playwriting Tournament at Cape Girardeau, Mo. in 1938.

DORA M. HOOPEL, author of the satirical comedy, *Where the Buffalo Roam*, is a native of Canada.

AMONG THE AUTHORS

BETTY SMITH and CLEMON WHITE, authors of *Bayou Harlequinade*, are graduates of the playwriting department of the University of North Carolina. They have written many popular one-act plays.

DON C. JONES' play, *The Cloak of Evil*, is a sequel to his very popular *The Inn of Return*, which appeared in Volume I of this series. *The Cloak of Evil* won first prize in the North Dakota tournament of 1939.

MARION L. TALLMAN is a newcomer to the playwriting field.

VIRGIL L. BAKER, author of *The Ring*, is a graduate of the University of Iowa's playwriting department. His *Ol' Captain* was included in Volume I of this series.

PHOEBE HOFFMAN, author of *Mary Finds a Mother*, has written a number of popular one-act plays.

FRANCES FOX, author of *Lacquer and Jade*, is working in the playwriting department of the University of North Carolina.

SPRANGER BARRY (*Play Ball*) is a pen-name for a popular one-act playwright.

Chico, by HARRY C. GIBBS, was produced by Washington University in St. Louis during the fall of 1939.

